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Oaktober celebrates trees at Clear Lake

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Lucas Larson of Clear Lake helps Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy Executive Director Bridget Harrison plant an oak tree at Borton Wetland Nature Preserve, a 12-acre conservancy preserve, on Saturday.

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CLEAR LAKE — The Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy celebrated Oaktober this past weekend.

Fifty-three oak and tulip trees were planted by 28 volunteers at 20 private Clear Lake locations and four conservancy properties. They included trees planted by Fremont Elementary School Girl Scout Troop No. 52116, overseen by district program assistant and troop leader Tracy Hughes.

Since its creation in 1991, the Clear Lake Township Land Conservancy's mission has been to preserve, —

protect and manage the natural environment within the watershed and township for future generations. The conservancy has an office at Clear Lake Town Hall, 111 Gecowets Drive. Bridget Harrison is executive director.

“We ordered the bare root bur oak and tulip trees from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry,” said Harrison. “Don Luepke, conservancy volunteer, potted all 200 trees and has been caring for them since April.”

The 100 tulip poplars and 100 bur oak saplings received in the spring were small starts, so the conservancy gave them a chance to get a little bigger and stronger throughout the year. Clear Lake residents could pick up trees for a \$5 donation and plant them at any time.

“It’s been really well received,” said Harrison.

The final tree-planting push occurred over the weekend, when volunteers worked Saturday and Sunday. The planting was made possible with support from a Thrivent grant and is part of the district’s 30th anniversary, which will culminate next August.

Harrison and Clear Lake resident Lucas Larson planted four trees at Old Town Hall Park Saturday morning then moved on to Borton Wetland Nature Preserve, 12 acres protected by the conservancy on the eastern side of Clear Lake.

They took an oak tree across the street to the Johnston property, where they planted it amid prairie plants being propagated by Gary and Judy Johnston. The prairie was planted several years ago by Blue Heron Ministries.

“This was yellow and purple and gorgeous,” Judy said, sweeping her hand toward 7 acres of prairie

surrounded by tall mature trees, also colored like a rainbow with fall leaves.

Larson planted a tulip poplar at his lakeside property, which features large flourishing trees.

“My property’s pretty wooded,” Larson said, “but I wanted to plant a tree.”

He chose a fast-growing tulip to replace a tree that had fallen in an open, wet area on the shore.

“They like to have their feet wet so it’s a really good spot,” said Harrison.

Tulip trees, the state tree of Indiana, grow up to 24 inches a year, according to the Arbor Day Foundation. They bloom in May and June, producing tulip-shaped flowers with greenish-yellow petals, a splash of orange at their base.

In comparison to the tulip trees, the bur oak trees grow over the span of several human lifetimes. Tolerant of a variety of soil and moisture conditions, bur oak trees grow to 70 to 80 feet tall but mature slowly, adding less than 12 inches a year, according to the Arbor Day Foundation.

A bur oak can live more than 300 years, so those that plant them are not thinking of themselves, rather those in the future who will benefit from the shade and natural environment created by the tree.

The Johnstons’ grandchildren watched as the oak was planted Saturday, cheeks rosy in the cool fall temperatures. They are the seventh generation of the family to enjoy the Clear Lake homestead, said Judy. The Johnstons’ contribution to perpetuating a natural environment bodes well for the generations to come.

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