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APPROXIMATELY 400 TREES were planted in Port Washington, many along city streets, during the past month by members of the city's Street Department. As they planted, Gerard Lanser (left) shoveled soil around a sapling held by Bill Carroll.

Photo by Sam Arendt

Addition of 400 trees along streets this spring part of beautification effort

Port Washington earned its title as a Tree City USA, planting 400 trees along city streets during the past month.

Many of those trees were along streets that were constructed or reconstructed last year — South Wisconsin, Division and Chestnut streets and Sunset Road west of Highway LL, to name a few, Street Commissioner Dave Ewig said.

Others were planted to replace trees that had to be removed or to fill in gaps in the tree line along city streets, he said.

The city has been planting between 300 and 500 trees annually for the past several years, said Ewig, with a goal of creating a canopy over the streets.

"I think most people value trees," Ewig said. "I think they understand the value of the shade and the cooling effect."

The benefits of trees are well known, ranging from the removal of pollutants in the air and the slowing of stormwater runoff. They are an aesthetic feature of a community that also increase property values.

Port city crews completed this year's tree planting last Friday, Ewig said. It's a month-long process that starts with digging holes for the trees — something that by itself takes a week — and ends with mulching around the newly planted saplings.

The city will monitor the weather conditions and, if it gets too dry this summer, will water the saplings two or three times, Ewig said.

Port Washington, like many communities around the state, lost its elms to Dutch elm disease decades ago and is on the cusp of losing its ash trees to the emerald ash borer.

But the city has learned its lesson and no longer depends on only one type of tree. It has diversified its trees, and this year planted several varieties of maples, lindens, elms, Kentucky coffee tree, ginkgo, flowering crabs and even a few evergreens, Ewig said.

The city doesn't typically plant evergreens, he said.

"This year, we just felt there were a couple locations suited to that type of planting," he said.

Those include an area along Spring Street between Third and Fourth streets and an area off South Wisconsin Street near the We Energies power plant, he said.

If people ask for a specific type of tree, the city will try to honor their request, Ewig said.

And in the few instances when someone asks that a tree not be planted, the city will consider the request on a case-by-case basis, he said.

Roughly 90% of the saplings planted by the city are bare-root trees. They not only cost significantly less than those that are balled-and-burlaped, they are easier to handle and faster to plant.

Through the years, they city has gotten the process down pat, Ewig said, with a success rate of more than 90%.

"We've learned a lot of little things about how to plant them," he said. "We think that's a pretty high rate of success. We're pleased."

The city budgets about $3,000 annually for replacement trees. The cost of trees planted along reconstructed streets is built into the project cost.