



University still replacing trees damaged during Gustav

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Published: Thursday, March 19, 2009

Updated: Thursday, March 19, 2009

Some of the trees that survived the blow dealt by Hurricane Gustav more than six months ago have gone on to prosper, and others are still recovering.

The University lost about 230 trees after Gustav, and another 100 sustained damage.

Nearly 100 trees were replanted, including a mature live-oak tree and two small live oaks, according to Fred Fellner, Facility Services assistant director.

The shade-providing plants should be restored in the coming year, according to Fellner.

“We’re still cleaning up some stumps ... We’re still expending our labor resources on that,” Fellner said. “ By the time we get to next winter, we should have everything replaced.”

The University purchases its trees from a wholesaler because it enables them to pick the specific specimen of trees native to southern Louisiana and choose when they’re purchased.

“A lot of times, donated trees are not the same quality as one that you can buy,” Fellner said. “We took a lot of effort to plant them correctly and keep them alive.”

Facility Services typically replants between 30 and 40 each year aside from the trees that need to be replaced from hurricane damage, Fellner said. With labor and miscellaneous expenses, Fellner said Facility Services spends as much as \$300,000 per year on tree maintenance.

In the 1990s, estimates put the worth of the University’s live oaks at \$36 million and suggested the towering plants might be saving the University as much as \$1 million in electricity, but according to Facility Services Manager Richard Humphreys, present-day plant materials could be worth more than \$50 million.

Bob Hearn, engineer with the Department of Public Works, said the DPW collected more than 2 million cubic yards of debris in Baton Rouge from damaged trees in the wake of Gustav. The



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Richard Humphreys, Facility Services manager, stands next to the Tony Pertitta Memorial Red Oak outside of the University Laboratory School as he discusses the University’s management strategy for trees damaged during Hurricane Gustav.

collection was about four times more than DPW collected in Baton Rouge after Hurricane Katrina, Hearn said.

“The whole time Gustav was going on, our streets department was still working,” Hearn said.

Greg Bivin, landscape architect with the Department of Public Works, said foresters throughout the country came to Baton Rouge in the wake of Gustav to work on the damaged trees, which were either taken down, pruned or removed.

But Bivin said the amount of time that may pass before any trees on public property are replaced is unpredictable — there’s currently no funding.

“Right now, they’re working to get some grant money through the federal government to replace [damaged trees],” Bivin said. “There may be some money coming our way from the stimulus bill. We don’t have a program right now to come in and start replacing trees that were damaged.”

Chéré Coen, freelance journalist and part-time hurricane recovery worker, said she has been working as a part of the Resurrection Project in conjunction with the Arbor Day Foundation since Hurricane Katrina to replace trees lost to hurricanes. The Foundation donated about 25,000 seedlings for Gustav recovery, which Coen has worked to distribute throughout southern Louisiana.

Some of the seedlings will be available free of charge at this weekend’s Baton Rouge garden show, Coen said. The show is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday at 9 a.m. in the Parker Coliseum, according to an LSU AgCenter news release.

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