



Oak Cliff group plants trees in Polk Street neighborhood, looks to do more

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Community volunteers are rolling up their sleeves and investing a little sweat equity to beautify Oak Cliff. And they're hoping to entice neighbors and business owners to get involved.

"This is our neighborhood, and we are responsible for it," said Lenora Casmore, a Glen Oaks neighborhood resident and a member of the Polk Street Beautification Project.

The group was organized in 2004 and is served by volunteers who live in neighborhoods that border Polk Street between U.S. Highway 67 and Interstate 20. Ms. Casmore estimates the area includes about 10,000 homes.

"We're trying to let a lot more people know about what we're doing and get more people interested," she said. "We're trying to teach community responsibility."

Polk Street volunteers have helped revitalize Twin Falls Park. In June, members hosted a health fair and walkathon.

The volunteers are also planting crape myrtles along Polk Street in a multiphase project through the city of Dallas' MOWmentum Program. Under the program, groups, businesses and individuals partner with the city to adopt public rights of way and maintain and improve the property.

Volunteers have planted 77 crape myrtles along the Polk Street median between Highway 67 and Red Bird Lane. In the next phase, the group will plant from Red Bird Lane to Camp Wisdom Road. The final phase will include the stretch of Polk from Camp Wisdom to Interstate 20.

"When this community was developed, there were crape myrtles all up and down Polk Street. We wanted the crape myrtles back," said Joannia Johnson, who has lived in Oak Cliff for 35 years. "People absolutely love it. They have been telling us how nice the trees look."

Planting trees not only beautifies a neighborhood, it's good for the environment, said Steve Houser, chairman of the city of Dallas Urban Forest Advisory Committee.

"Trees are the very foundation of an urban landscape. They do a lot for our air quality, benefit our health and add to our sense of well-being," he said, adding that trees also help save energy, reduce stormwater runoff and protect road asphalt. "Asphalt that is shaded by trees lasts twice as long. Planting trees is something you can do to positively affect air quality, livability and beautification in your neighborhood."

Polk Street Beautification Project members hope more people will go green, get involved and give back.

"The world was given to us not to demolish but to add to," Ms. Casmore said. "At the end of the day, if we can't look back and say we made it better, our living has been in vain."

Barrie Page Hill is a freelance writer in Arlington.