

Friend of the Forest: Urban forester to study, promote trees

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It may be known for its birds, its warm weather and even its food, but one thing McAllen certainly isn't known for is its forests.

Enter Mark Kroeze, McAllen's urban forester.

The position is an unusual one, since lush, green forests aren't exactly the first thing that comes to mind when one pictures the city.

But Kroeze says in his position, he tries to see the forest for the trees.

"An urban forester thinks of individual trees," explained Kroeze, 25, who began working for the city last week.

As the city's first urban forester, he's been tasked with studying and maintaining the city's trees - which make up the "urban forest."

And he took a roundabout way of getting here.

The University of Minnesota graduate hails from the most northern part of that state and worked in construction management in New Zealand, where he worked to help protect trees as new buildings went up.

He now joins his fiancée, a PSJA teacher, in the Rio Grande Valley.

Kroeze is charged with the arduous task of tracking all of the city's trees to ensure that, in the event of another [hurricane](#), they don't pose a safety threat by posing a risk of toppling over or losing branches.

He'll also soon begin a year-long, city-wide tree survey, to try to assign an actual dollar value of the city's trees, based on the effect they have on cooling the environment, improving drainage and reducing air pollution.

That information will help leaders decide how much to invest in planting trees, since the return investment exceeds the cost of the trees itself, Kroeze said.

And since the city doesn't have a handle on the number, species and location of all its trees, the survey will help guide decisions on what to plant and where.

"We'll help people in the Valley understand the value of one tree," Kroeze said.

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