

TLC, BUSINESSES PLANT OAK TREES FOR BETTER

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Robin Jones, left, Maddie Mochan, her mother Lindsay Mochan and Ashley Theisen, 3, water a newly planted oak tree in a conservation area east of Randall Road and north of Acorn Lane in Lake in the Hills on Thursday. (Travis Houghton - thaughton@nwherald.com)

LAKE IN THE HILLS – Planting an oak seedling is a relatively easy task – it takes less than 20 minutes usually – but the payoff of a fully developed tree goes unseen for decades.

“It takes up to 20 years for an oak to produce acorns, but the tree will be around for hundreds of years after that,” said Rob Schrempf, an employee of Red Buffalo Nursery.

Still, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County considers planting oak trees and other environmental improvements worthwhile long-term investments, and on Thursday the nonprofit group teamed up with several local businesses for a special Earth Day project.

Employees of Crystal Lake’s Infinity Day Spa and their family members planted five red oak seedlings donated by Marengo’s Ohana Farms in a clearing northeast of the intersection of North Randall Road and West Acorn Lane.

The trees were planted for the spa’s wellness members, and the TLC-sponsored project is becoming an annual event for Infinity’s employees.

“This is our second year closing down the spa on Earth Day,” Infinity owner Robin Jones said. “We come out here so my team and I can give back to the community.”

Long ago, oak trees dominated the landscape of McHenry County. But since 1870, farming, development and invasive species have wiped out 80 percent of the local population. In 1991 TLC formed to preserve the county's native species, including oaks, which are essential to local ecosystems.

"Oaks provide a lot of food for local wildlife like birds, butterflies, squirrels, chipmunks and deer," said Cheryl Perrone, a TLC representative.

Volunteers also spread seeds of big bluestem grass, a grass native to McHenry County that, unlike invasive grass, does not prevent the oaks from growing.

"Native species were here first, and when invaders come in, they take over and natives don't have a chance to germinate, especially oaks," Schrempf said.

Thursday marked the first time that TLC planted oaks in Lake in the Hills, but the group has been working in other parts of McHenry County for years.

Some of the organization's other projects include an oak tree sale to raise funds for further conservations efforts, and Oak Keeper training programs.

Information about these programs can be found at the group's website, www.conservemc.org.

Infinity Spa employees who planted oak seedlings said they hoped that other community members would take notice and get involved by participating in similar environmental improvement projects.

"A lot of us are going to start families and have children soon," said spa employee Ashley Hammer of Crystal Lake. "It is important to us to have a clean and healthy place for our families to live."