Fund will bring 20,000 trees to Houston

By LORI RODRIGUEZ
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Calling all tree-huggers!

You can help plant 20,000 trees along Will Clayton Parkway on Saturday in what organizers say is the largest volunteer tree-planting in Houston's history.

"It's going to be a big deal. Really, it's going to be a party," said Gary Woods with Trees for Houston, a nonprofit organization that promotes protection and planting of trees.

Saturday's event is part of the Houston Area Freeway and Forestation Project sponsored by U.S. Rep. Ted Poe, R-Humble.

In 2006, Poe obtained $28.5 million in funding for beautification, erosion prevention and flood-control programs in the Houston area.

That funding will bear fruit, or at least put down roots, this weekend as Poe, community leaders, Trees for Houston, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and the Texas Department of Transportation join forces for the Arbor Day 2007 tree-planting.

"I am so proud of this funding. Being on the Transportation Committee and putting together the transportation bill isn't just about laying concrete," Poe said.

Besides the environmental and beautification benefits, he predicted the project will promote economic development by attracting businesses to the area, increasing property values and encouraging tourism.

Planners chose the site near George Bush Intercontinental Airport because studies show that visitors' first impressions of a city are the most lasting, Woods said.

"We're doing our best to beautify the areas around both airports, including the adjoining neighborhoods," he said. "We have our work cut out for us."

Rain or shine, the planting will be along a mile-and-a-half strip of the Will Clayton Parkway esplanade between Lee and the Eastex Freeway (U.S. 59).

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