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Mission to reforest Des Moines begins at Union Park

Charles Flesher, Press-Citizen

Standing in the shadows of the giant rocket slide in Union Park, Des Moines officials launched a new plan to reforest the city's urban play area on Saturday, Oct. 29.

Damaged by age, harsh winters and disease, many of Des Moines' oldest trees are dying - leaving much of the city's park land more and more exposed.

So, together with Trees Forever, a national non-profit tree planting organization, the city announced plans to reforest much of the city's park over the next five years.

"A lot of our trees are old and it's time we restock (the parks)," said Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie,

Cownie and about 30 other volunteers, got the program started Saturday morning.

The group included Council member Bob Mahaffey, Parks Board Chair Suzette Jensen and several neighborhood volunteers.

They planted 40 oaks, lindens, maples and hackberrys around the playground at Union Park.

The trees were purchased by Trees Forever with a grant from the Home Depot Foundation and the Alliance for Community Trees.

Union is one of six parks that will be part of the first phase of



Photo by Charles Flesher
Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie and Council member Bob Mahaffey help plant a tree Saturday morning at Union Park.

replanting.

Ewing, Grandview, Greenwood, MacRae, Pioneer, and Union parks will be planted with 1,700 new trees over the next year.

Volunteers planted 40 trees as part of a new program to re-forest the park system.

"It takes 30 to 40 years for a park to mature and these are long past that," said Jensen.

The six parks the city will start with and some of the city's largest. Most were purchased in the late 1800s and have large older trees.

"They are kind of the central parks of our system," said Parks and Rec Director Don Tripp.

Once the larger parks are completed, the city will begin plantings in smaller locations.

Trees Forever will work with neighborhood groups and volunteers to help plant trees in parks as well as private land as part of its Tree Forever Parks & Neighbors program.

Volunteers will be recruited to care for new trees through an adopt-a-tree program.

"It's one thing to plant them and another thing to care for them," said Tripp.

According to Tripp, the city's large shade trees and one of the greatest attractions for residents and visitors.

"We're proud of that and it's important to take care of it," he said.

As Trees Forever trains volunteers from the community to care for the new trees, it will also work with the city to find funding sources for the re-forestation program.

By next spring, city officials hope to have thousands of more trees to plant.

"This is really going to be a big, big attraction for the neighborhoods and the parks," said Mahaffey.