

Tree-planters sweat for shade in Jacksonville's Klutho Park

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By [Steve Patterson](#)

A canopy of leafy shade trees might cover Klutho Park some day.

But Thursday, a sea of blue T-shirts covered the turf.

Volunteers sporting the shirts fanned out across blocks of the Springfield park, digging holes and toting mulch in a drive to plant 100 new trees on a sunny, hot afternoon.

People were eager to see the results.

"It's a really inexpensive way of making a dramatic difference," Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton said after stopping by to thank the crowd of workers.

Protecting the city's tree cover will be more important as the city grows, he said, because the trees clean pollution out of Jacksonville's air and water as well as make the city look better.

Railroad giant CSX provided nearly all of the labor and bought the trees as part of a corporate project to plant 21,000 trees nationally.

Rounding up 170 volunteers didn't seem to be a big challenge.

"I've always believed in this stuff. Planting trees. Recycling. I've been doing it since the '70s, before it was fashionable," said Mary Jo Vollrath, who works in the railroad's real estate office.

Greenscape of Jacksonville and City Hall added some direction and planning, touching base with neighbors and studying the park's layout to decide what trees should go where in a spread between Broad and Silver streets.

A lot of the hard, cold logistics came from workers at City Year, a nonprofit CSX is working with at plantings around the country.

The new trees will reinforce the look and feel the park was designed to have as early as the 1940s, said Don Robertson, an urban forester for the city.

Live oaks and magnolias were planted in open areas where they could eventually spread big canopies of branches. Cypresses were put in low spots of the flood-prone park, and crape myrtles were spread around as smaller, decorative plantings.

The city's hoping to set up more projects with CSX, even if they're not on the same ambitious scale, Robertson said.

"If they have money to spend in Jacksonville, we can help them," he said.

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