

Cyprus Joins Effort to Restore Massachusetts Avenue

Walking up and down Massachusetts Avenue to work for years, Deborah Shapley, a resident of the Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood, said she "got more and more steamed up" about the loss of trees on Embassy Row. It began with the elm blight in the late 1970s, and later, with increasingly urban development, residents and embassies were cutting down trees to make more room.

Finally, she decided she had to do something. She gathered some like-minded friends and in November 2006 launched the group Restore Mass Ave, working with Casey Trees and the District's urban arborists to reforest the neighborhood. A recent fundraiser — coinciding with Earth Day — with Cypriot Ambassador Andreas Kakouris and his wife Kareen was typical of the members' elegant, low-key, in-the-neighborhood approach to environmentalism.



"We love Washington and its trees and we love our neighborhood," said Kareen Farrell Kakouris at the reception. "So when our neighbors asked us to help, of course we said yes."

Just a glance at a black-and-white photograph from 1913 with a horse and buggy shows how much Massachusetts Avenue has changed over the years. It's difficult to imagine how this now-busy corridor was once a serene neighborhood overflowing with a canopy of beautiful Linden trees, planted in double rows on each side of the sidewalk for four miles.

"We don't buy and plant trees," explained Shapley. "We could never raise enough money to do that, but we have arranged the planting of about 160 appropriate trees with the help of our partners Casey Trees, which donates many trees, as does the city, residents and embassies who help us. Then, we make sure they are watered so they survive."

Today, Restore Mass Ave is an alliance of residents, foreign missions, arborists and nonprofit groups working to rebuild the tree canopy and historic landscape that made Massachusetts Avenue a world attraction in the early 20th century. Through outreach and education, they attract participation by property owners, one-third of whom are foreign missions. They also continually train their volunteers to be "tree keepers" who become foster parents for particular trees. In addition, Restore Mass Ave hopes to become a

model for creating green neighborhoods elsewhere.

Over the years, many tree-planting ceremonies at various embassies thanks to the group's efforts. Most recently, sixth-graders from the City Collegiate Public Charter School, a local school that uses Mitchell Park in Kalorama for its recess, joined the ambassadors of Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire for a tree planting. Other diplomatic partners have included the embassies of Korea, Zambia, Guatemala, Paraguay, Romania, Burkina Faso, Chad, Slovenia, Finland and Italy.

City Collegiate social studies teacher Carrie Ray-Hill said her students "were able to see the concepts of international government, community, stewardship and cooperation in action."

Ambassador Charles Koffi of Côte d'Ivoire told the D.C. students, "We share completely your involvement in making the preservation of nature the center of your organization. Half a century ago, my country was covered with 20 million hectares of tropical forest. Because of irrational timber industry methods, the forest in Côte d'Ivoire has dwindled to 3 million hectares. This perfect symphony where human beings, animals and vegetation are living together should be protected at all costs."

For more information, visit www.restoremassave.org.

From left, Deborah Shapley, founder and president of Restore Mass Ave, Ambassador of Cyprus Andreas Kakouris and his wife Kareen Kakouris display a photograph of what Massachusetts Avenue looked like at the turn of the 20th century at a recent fundraising reception for Restore Mass Ave.

Photos: Gail Scott

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<http://www.washdiplomat.com/DPouch/2010/May/050310lifestyle.html>