

**REFORESTATION OF OAK RIDGE ACADEMY CAMPUS AND HIGHWAY 150 CORRIDOR
1982-1985**

- *By Claudia and Frank Whitaker*

Frank Whitaker, a life-long citizen of Oak Ridge with deep family ties to the community, observed the steady loss of large shade trees along Highway 150 over three decades. This was especially true on the Oak Ridge Military Academy campus. During that time, he could not recall the replacement of a single tree lost to storms, abuse, disease or age.

In 1981 Frank began to explore a way to reforest the Academy campus, where he was an alumnus and Highway 150. While a student at Carolina he had admired the large Willow Oak trees on campus for their beauty, durability, and relatively fast growth rate and felt that the Willow Oak would be a good substitute for the traditional slow-growing Red and White Oak trees that had been lost.

Frank had the good fortune to develop a relationship with Ronald Copeland, owner of Apex Nursery located between Siler City and Raleigh. The nursery had a contact in Tennessee that would ship Willow Oak seedlings (liners) for a cost of fifty cents each. The plan was presented to the Oak Ridge Community Council. The Council agreed to underwrite the purchase from Horse Show revenue. In 1982 Frank planted three hundred seedlings, approximately sixteen inches tall, in a sandy soil meadow behind his residence located just east of the Academy.

What followed was a cooperative effort to maintain and transplant the trees. That collaboration included the support of the Oak Ridge Garden Club. The Fire Department agreed to furnish water during the transplanting process. Other interested citizens joined the effort.

On March 30, 1985, the process of transplanting the then six-foot-tall trees began, followed by additional plantings. The trees were removed bare root from the sandy soil and transported in a manner that maintained root moisture in route to designated sites. The holes had previously been dug with a two-foot rented auger from Joe's Landscape Nursery. The auger was attached to a tractor borrowed from Spencer Sullivan.

Frank provided an additional tractor and trailer to transport the trees and mulch. The Oak Ridge Fire Dept. truck stood by to thoroughly water each tree as soon as it was planted and mulched by the volunteers. Almost all the trees survived their relocation.

Individuals involved in the planting included Miles and Jane Foy, Gary Blackburn, Spencer Sullivan, Wayne and Diane Roberts, Jay Bumm, Isabelle Whitaker, Martha Weatherford, Clarence Browning, Frank and Claudia Whitaker, and a fireman and three others that cannot be identified from 1985 photographs. Property owners along Highway 150 had been contacted to receive their permission for planting the trees. Some others also requested trees.

The cash outlay for the project was two hundred dollars for the trees and auger rental.

Those small seedlings have grown into the sixty-foot-tall shade trees that in 2022 cover the Academy Campus, the Oak Ridge Elementary School frontage, the front yard of Oakhurst, the Jesse Benbow house

yard, the east boundary of Heritage Farm Park and the Methodist Church cemetery. They line portions of Highway 150 for over two miles from Heritage Farm Park to East Harrell Road.

“Long after our names are forgotten there will be great trees in which the birds of the air will make their homes, and under which the sons of men will find rest – the trees that we planted. In the life of our trees, we shall lift our faces to the sun and cast our shadows upon the earth for a hundred years.”

Author unknown