

# KATE CHILLS TALLAHASSEE'S INFATUATION WITH ITS TREES

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Written By Susan DeFord

In the wake of Hurricane Kate, Tallahassee's love affair with trees has cooled a bit.

Some residents have called city and county officials to complain that trees are liability. Some are asking that other giant trees be cut down, lest a subsequent storm topple them.

One person has even canceled a planned \$10,000 donation to a local tree-planting group.

Chuck Goodheart, the city's urban forester, cautions storm-weary residents not to overreact, and not to forget that planting new trees is as important as removing old ones.

But even he acknowledges that maybe local regulations have been safeguarding the wrong kinds of trees.

'We concentrate on protecting the big old trees,' he said. 'They're the ones that fall down.'

They're the ones that, during what some call the city's worst storm ever, smashed through roofs, tore through power lines and thudded across neighborhood streets.

The results were costly. Though the November 21 storm took no lives in Tallahassee, it destroyed more than 20 buildings, damaged more than 1,200 others and cost the city's electric utility about \$2 million in repairs.

"All these darn trees knocked down all the lines," said Dave Krause, one of the founders of the Arbor Green tree-planting group. "People are sitting out there with no power and food rotting in the refrigerator. It's very irritating.

With their shallow root systems and tall trunks, pine trees suffered the greatest toll. On the whole, live oaks weathered the storm well, Goodheart said. But other oak species, such as laurels, Southern red oaks and water oaks, were upended.

"Many of the downed trees I've looked at had disease," he said. "These are the ones nature scheduled for removal."

Nature's method of thinning the forest doesn't sit well with some. Mayor Hurley Rudd said he has received several telephone calls from irate residents.

"There is some sentiment that trees are part of our problem," he said. "It was people who were just disgusted with the whole situation."

Despite the havoc created by falling trees, Rudd said, he still thinks they're a distinctive part of Tallahassee.

"I don't think we want to become a community where you clear cut around power lines," he said.

Charles Field, Leon County environmental inspector, said one of the phone calls county officials received was from a resident who had in her yard a patriarch oak, a tree that predates Tallahassee's founding 160 years ago. Though the oak survived the storm, she wanted to cut it down because the next storm might topple it onto her house, Field said.

"I'm concerned we're going to see a lot of requests to take down trees," he said. "If they weathered the storm, they should be in fair shape."

A planned tree-planting project by Arbor Green along the reconstructed stretch of Thomasville Road also has suffered a set back in Hurricane Kate's aftermath.

A private benefactor who had pledged more than \$10,000 to plant oaks along the 1.5-mile section recently called Krause to withdraw the offer.

"He thought there were enough trees now," said Krause, who declined to name the person.

That reaction worries Goodheart. He believes replanting is as vital to the city's urban forest as restrictions on cutting trees.

Goodheart pointed out that most younger, smaller trees withstood Kate's vicious winds. He feels the storm underscores the need to begin nurturing a new generation of trees to replace an aging urban canopy.

"It's like having a society where everyone's over 70 years old," he said. "It's not very vigorous."

In the coming year, Goodheart said, he plans to prepare a proposal for expanding the city's tree-planting program. Now, the city depends on residents to maintain planted saplings for a year under its adopt-a-tree program.

In addition, Goodheart would like to see right-of-way crews begin planting saplings in areas of town devoid of trees. He and maintenance chief Richard Tidwell also are expanding the variety of trees available from the city's 11-acre nursery.

"The natural thing to do is replant," Goodheart said. "You can still enjoy the (younger) trees and not incur the potential hazard of older trees."