



THE BEAUTY OF TREES

The Outdoor Circle's legacy grows from trees planted across Hawaii

ISLAND VOICES



Scott R. Wilson is immediate past president of The Outdoor Circle.

By Scott R. Wilson

2022 marks the 110th anniversary of the founding of The Outdoor Circle, the oldest environmental organization in Hawaii. Although well-known for advocating for statewide legislation that banned billboards, since our founding our focus has been on beautification and planting of beautiful and cooling shade trees throughout the islands.

In 1912, our seven founders took on their first beautification project, planting 28 monkeypod trees in Aala Park to “shade the children’s play area.” That was followed shortly by tree-planting on Kalakaua Avenue with scores of true mahogany trees, hundreds of coconut palms, and more than a thousand oleanders to beautify the entrance to Waikiki.



Many projects quickly followed as residents were taken by the idea of a “City Beautiful” campaign: shower trees along Vineyard Boulevard, kukui trees on Tantalus and Round Top Drive and canopy shade trees in Thomas Square and parks in Kalihi, Pauoa, and Alapai Plaza. Queen’s Hospital, the grounds of Iolani Palace and Queen Emma Summer Palace were also some beneficiaries of our earliest tree plantings.

The success of these efforts led to the 1922 creation, at the behest of The Outdoor Circle, of the Shade Tree Commission within the Honolulu city government to help set guidelines to beautify the city and plant trees. This commission would later become the genesis of the city’s Division of Urban Forestry.

In the four decades following its founding, Outdoor Circle members planted tens of thousands of trees throughout Honolulu and Leeward Oahu beautifying not only our streets, schools, playgrounds and parks, but military bases as well. In the late 1940s, newly formed branches of The Outdoor Circle extended efforts into communities across Oahu and then to Kauai, Maui and Hawaii island, with a focus on all manner of projects of local interest. These are as varied as park adoptions, preserving and protecting critical wetlands and scenic view planes, and spearheading tree plantings and tree giveaways. Our branches created community and botanical gardens and established educational programs and scholarships to mentor our future environmen-

tal stewards.

Our tree plantings have continued unabated over this century-plus history and proud legacy. The large shade trees we all enjoy today in our urban areas were most likely planted or advanced by The Outdoor Circle — work that continues to the present.

From many scientific studies, we realize trees are essential to sustain and uplift our lives in important ways. Shade trees create dramatically cooler urban temperatures which allow for more walkable, vibrant and livable neighborhoods. They also improve mental and physical health, capture rainwater, and help mitigate global warming, among many other benefits they provide.

In recognition of the critical value of trees, the branches of The Outdoor Circle, in conjunction with Hawaii’s Arbor Day which is celebrated annually in November, will hold tree giveaways throughout the state to encourage residents to plant trees on their property. (For more information, see www.outdoorcircle.org.)

Planting trees is an easy way for all of us to both enhance our environment and help preserve the planet for future generations. The vital importance of trees, and shade trees in particular, continues to be at the heart of the mission of The Outdoor Circle. We welcome everyone to join our continuing and focused mission of keeping Hawaii a clean, green, beautiful, sustainable and livable place.

This November, please join with us in celebrating the beauty and importance of trees in our lives, for today and our future.