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Tri-state united for Plant a Wish

By KATIE SCHWENDEMAN (kschwendeman@reviewonline.com)

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OHIOVILLE, Pa. - Saturday was a landmark day for many tri-state officials as they gathered at the Point of Beginning to plant three trees, each in a separate state.

Joseph Imhoff and his wife, Sara Tekula, were on hand to help plant the trees as part of Plant a Wish, a public awareness project they founded for the purpose of inspiring the restoration of native habitats around America.

Imhoff and Tekula, from Maui, Hawaii, said they asked friends and family at their wedding ceremony to write down wishes on a piece of paper and put them into the ground where they later planted a tree.

"Because all of those wishes were underneath that tree, we thought about that tree a little more than any other tree ... We were kind of deeply connected to it, and we realized there was something really special about that," Imhoff said.

Following their wedding, the couple decided they wanted to plant a tree in all 50 states to raise awareness about the importance of a healthy environment.

"We are not here to teach you about your environment; we are here to remind you that your environment is very special and needs to be protected at all costs," Imhoff said.

Those who turned out Saturday to plant trees were Hancock County commissioners Dan Greathouse, Mike Swartzmiller and Jeff Davis; West Virginia State Delegate Randy Swartzmiller; Columbiana County Commissioner Penny Traina; Ohioville Mayor John Szatkiewicz and wife Linda; Ohio River Trail Council CEO Vincent Troia; Jim Camp (standing in for Beaver County Commissioner Charlie Camp); Beaver County Historical Research Executive Director Brenda Applegate; First Energy Corporation representative Mark Valach; and the Rev. Norman Eckert, of Beechwood and Ohioville Free Methodist churches.

Traina was excited to meet commissioners from neighboring states for the first time.

"What a landmark (this is) today," she said. "A special thanks to Sara and Joe for coming all the way from Hawaii so the three states could get together and hopefully move forward economically and in our government. On behalf of Ohio and Columbiana County, we appreciate your efforts."

Troia explained the Saturday event was made possible after Imhoff and Tekula found the Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) on Facebook and requested to plant trees in the three states.

The ORTC is a non-profit volunteer-led corporation focused on unifying individuals and all levels of government for the promotion and protection of natural and cultural resources along the Ohio River and its tributaries.

Troia said he agreed to the request because it lined up with the council mission, which is to have a clean environment.

"Each tree that is planted absorbs about one year's worth of emissions of carbon dioxide," he said.

Troia suggested the trees be planted at the Point of Beginning because it is where Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia come together.

The Point of Beginning served as the original survey mark for the opening of the Northwest Territories in the 1700s.

Another reason Troia suggested the location was because the proposed Ohio River Trail will pass by it, he said.

Article Photos



Plant a Wish co-founder Sara Tekula (front) filmed while Brenda Applegate (left), Joseph Imhoff, Vincent Troia, Jim Camp III, and Ohioville, Pa. Mayor John Szatkiewicz dug a hole for a tree to be planted in Pennsylvania Saturday. (Photo by Katie Schwendeman)

When completed, the trail will interconnect existing trails in the tri-state area.

Troia also recommended state trees be planted in each state.

A Buckeye tree was planted in Ohio and a Sugar Maple was planted in West Virginia.

The Hemlock is the state tree for Pennsylvania, but a Honey Locust tree was planted instead.

Trees were provided by the Beaver County Conservation District, Columbiana County Economic Development Office, and Ianneti's Garden Center.

Tekula pointed out planting native trees is crucial because not all trees thrive in certain environments.

"Planting a native tree ensures that your space is going to be protected, that land is going to stay in place," she said. "It's going to get the water it needs, and it's going to do its job."

Everyone was given the opportunity to write down a wish and place it in the soil where the trees were to be planted.

Once wishes were in the ground Imhoff placed the tree and officials shoveled earth over the roots.

"This is kind of historic, having three states, three different commissioners from three different counties, all working together," Szatkiewicz said.

Plant a Wish has already planted trees in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky.

Imhoff and Tekula are putting together a feature-length documentary of the nationwide tree planting tour, and plan on entering it into film festivals.

Funding for the project has been made possible through donations and Plant a Wish t-shirt sales.

Additional information can be found online at plantawish.org.

Additional information about the Ohio River Trail Council can be found at www.ohiorivertrail.org.

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