

Canyon Courier
Environment Column
submitted by Joan Spalding Feb 23,1998

“People Have to Care”

Old growth trees are often endangered on construction sites. Trees that provide a privacy barrier for new homes and enhance the aesthetic view of a new house are often so damaged during the building process that within a few years, because of their weakened condition they become susceptible to beetle and mistletoe.

The protection of these trees was a topic discussed in a meeting with two well known tree experts from our Front Range area. Ray Howe, retired city forester for Denver for many years helped develop new practices in safety and the management of trees and Gene Eyerly, whose work as a consultant has resulted in major standards being set for landscape management in Colorado. Both Eyerly and Howe are often hired as consulting arborists for court cases and landscape disputes.

We discussed the impact of development on trees and landscape during the construction process. Having been in the business since the 1940's, Eyerly was well aware and concerned about new development and the impact on trees. One major work in Denver was the construction of the new library. He exhibited pictures taken during construction which showed old growth Oaks and Ash with their roots covered with construction materials. No measures were taken to provide a fence around the trees to allow the roots to breathe and prevent compaction of the soil. The problem he cited is that trees can store two years of growth and not be impacted until the third or fourth year when they will pay the price for the improper handling. As a result, new home owners will find their trees become stressed after they have lived in the home a year or more.

Eyerly discussed the difference in ordinances that protect trees. In Aspen he said, “Trees can't be touched by the homeowner without approval from the city.”

“In Denver”, Howe recalled, “it's not that strict, but ordinances are in force to protect trees from diseases caused by other trees such as the Dutch Elm disease. Regulations are in effect to make sure that hazardous trees are cut down but often without adequate work force, the regulations can't be enforced.” He advised people to become aware of the requirements by contacting the forester's office.

“People have to care,” Howe said, “trees won't be protected until a group of citizens makes it a priority and makes sure that the trees aren't destroyed on the construction sites.” “It's a two edged sword, he said,” there are those who want to protect the trees but often contractors have to get the job done fast and the trees are forgotten.”

In my own experience, I remembered the construction sites I've worked on and it truly was up to the developer and their personal values whether the trees were saved. The

best methods involved developing an impact plan that would give contractors regulations to follow during the construction process to avoid negative impact on the trees. These plans include regulations for fencing, cutting roots, irrigation and bug control. In addition, procedures for keeping hazardous materials away from the drip lines of the tree are detailed. Also part of an impact plan includes suggestions for moving trees in the excavation areas to a holding area and moving them back after the construction process is completed

Throughout the state, different agencies provide help in saving trees. The State Forest service suggests that trees be thinned and removed from near the house for fire protection. Jefferson County asks that a certain amount of trees be planted on commercial sites. It's important that developers look at the long term impact of saving old growth trees.

But unless as forester Ray Howe said, the people immediately involved in the construction process care enough about saving trees, regulations are not effective.