

The Stories of Tree Visionaries

How do you introduce one of your very best friends? Tony is the Executive Director of Landscape Ontario, our professional industry trade association. Tony has been enthusiastic about Trees For Life from the beginning, almost 10 years ago. And it was Tony who put up his hand when we were trying to figure out how to plant trees in the urban environment and suggested that we reforest Highway 401, where the Highway of Heroes exists. The rest, as you will read, is history.



I hope that his story resonates with you as it does with me.

With my sincere thanks to him and his Landscape Ontario Team.

Mark Cullen

Mark Cullen,
Co-founding Chair of Canadian Trees For Life
On behalf of our volunteer and dedicated staff team
www.treesforlife.ca

"If you stare at too much concrete you forget the earth is alive"
-Bruce Cockburn

Think about it. Most of us have had encounters and relationships with trees. We have enjoyed their beauty. We have climbed or helped our children and grandchildren climb them. We have swung on ropes attached to their limbs. We have strung hammocks between them and slept in their cool shade. We have gathered acorns and chestnuts, and invented games using their seed. We have collected leaves and preserved them between the pages of our books. As children, we were delighted when we threw maple seeds up in the air and watched the "helicopters" gently swirl to the ground. We looked up in wonder to watch the birds, the squirrels, and the crows sheltered in their canopies. We enjoyed picnics under them. We have planted trees to recognize and memorialize births, anniversaries, and deaths. We have marveled at their majesty and longevity.

We have also taken them for granted and not noticed them at all. In honour of National Forest Week and National Tree Day, celebrated September 18-24 this year, we're shining a light on trees and forests through the stories of a few tree visionaries.

Every tree has a story. Most trees were planted by individuals we know nothing about. Why were they motivated to reach beyond themselves and in many cases beyond their mortality to provide a gift to future generations? There is something sacred about the simple act of tree planting. It is a gift of hope. It is a gift that enhances life and nature. It is a gift of legacy.



I love the story of Leslie Miller. He was a Canadian soldier in the First World War who collected acorns on the battlefield and sent them home to a farm in Scarborough Ontario. The oaks were planted in memory of the conflict but also in celebration of a better future. He named the farm Vimy Oaks. The farm is no longer. However, the now mature oaks adorn a church parking lot. A couple of years ago a man named Monty McDonald decided he would repatriate the progeny of the oaks to where they came from. The next generation of those oaks are now successfully planted in [Centennial Park](#) at Vimy Ridge, France.

I love the story of Ken Jewett. At 65, Ken retired from a successful food business to pursue his passion to return the native maple to Canada. Ken, now in his 90's, has convinced many nurseries to supply native Canadian Maples. His foundation, [Maple Leaves Forever \(MLEF\)](#), has encouraged thousands of people to plant them. MLEF provides incentives and subsidies to help successful gardeners. His foundation restores the native landscape. As the maple leaf is the symbol of Canada, planting native maples is an important and sacred initiative.

I love the story of Janet McKay. In 1996, Janet founded [LEAF \(Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests\)](#), and since then has planted tens of thousands of urban-based native trees and shrubs. The goal of LEAF is to work at the community level to improve the urban forest, both with homeowners and with larger plantings on municipal and private lands. Through their enthusiasm, leadership, intelligence, and tireless energy, Janet, and her LEAF staffers and volunteers have mobilized thousands of community members in Toronto and beyond to plant and care for their trees.

What is different about LEAF from many other tree advocacy initiatives is their education and awareness programs, which turn homeowners into tree champions, volunteers, and community leaders who pay it forward with their knowledge and energy, and their robust commitment to the urban forest canopy. We are proud to have LEAF as a planting partner!

I love the story of Edmund Zavitz. In the 1800's, most of Ontario's forests were cut down, with devastating effect. The topsoil blew away, wildlife disappeared, and rivers and streams dried up. In 1904, as a forestry professor from the University of Toronto, Zavitz came up with the idea to plant 2 billion trees. He convinced the government to back his plan and the rest is history. On a recent hike in the woods at Bond Lake in Richmond Hill, it suddenly dawned on me that the forest I was enjoying was likely planted as part of Edmund Zavitz's initiative. Most of Ontario's forests have their genesis in that program. The next time you are enjoying a drive on a country road lined with trees, thank Edmund Zavitz.



I love the story of Mark Cullen. Mark is one of the most generous and thoughtful individuals I know. He is Canada's best-known garden communicator, and has encouraged and helped millions of people to be successful gardeners. Mark is the volunteer chair of the [Highway of Heroes Tree Campaign \(HOHTC\)](#), and Canadian Trees for Life. He is quick to give accolades and praise to others, but the truth is, all of us involved in both organizations are there because of Mark's leadership, energy, enthusiasm, and passion for trees.

The HOHTC honours those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for Canada during times of conflict since 1812, and recognizes those who have or are serving their country in the military. By November of this year, all 2 million trees will be planted, creating the world's largest living tribute to them. It too is a gift of legacy and hope, and we thank the people and organizations that made this achievement possible.

These stories are about visionary individuals who are keen to contribute to a better future and a better world. They are stories about people who are joined by a timeless and intergenerational thread of care and hope, and who believe in taking responsibility and action.

As a Trees for Life newsletter reader, you too are one of these special individuals. We share the important and exciting job of helping Canadian communities plant more trees to combat climate change and increase biodiversity. Together let's reach beyond our mortality and leave the world better than we found it. We have work to do.

Tony DiGiovanni

Tony DiGiovanni
Executive Director, [Landscape Ontario](#)
Vice-President, [Trees for Life](#)

Latest Updates

Tree Love
September 18th-24th is **National Forest Week**
This is the perfect week to show off the tree-hugger in you, and it's a great time to plant a tree, period.
[Read more](#)

TFL Activities Supporting National Forest Week and National Tree Day
Honoring Heroes with Living Tributes during National Forest Week
[Read more](#)

Celebrity Tree Love
In honour of **National Forest Week**, we've featured a couple notable comments from well-known, tree-passionate Canadians.
[Read more](#)

Lynde Shores Conservation Area, Whitby, Ontario
More habitat for migrating birds, reptiles, and mammals, oh my!
[Read more](#)

Planting at Almet Farms - Bowmanville, Ontario
Our crews use every efficiency to achieve tree-planting goals and take extra care to respect the environment in which we plant.
[Read more](#)

The Annual Golf Tournament was a Success!
Thank you to all who participated! You made this a memorable event!
[Read more](#)

Canada Running Series: We have a team name!
Thanks to everyone who submitted an idea. The votes are in and the winning submission is...
[Read more](#)

Partner Spotlight
FORESTS ONTARIO
Forests Ontario and the World's Largest Living Tribute
Of the many partners and supporters that have contributed to this achievement, one of our greatest allies is Forests Ontario.
[Read more](#)

Pro Tree care tips from Mark Cullen
Top tips for protecting your trees through the winter.
[Read more](#)

Get to Know your Native Trees
The Oak: we thought it fitting given our running team name!
[Read more](#)

Stories of Honour: Corporal Michael Lesmeister
Michael Lesmeister was born on September 29th, 1923 to Michael and Theresa Lesmeister in the small village of Leipzig, Saskatchewan.
By the end of 1942, Canada's growing participation in the Second World War required more and more young men to join the armed forces. Michael was therefore conscripted into the Canadian Army in November 1942.
[Read more](#)

Scroll of Honour
Donations since the last newsletter have been made in honour of the following individuals & organizations.

- Southlake Regional Health Centre Cardiac Cath Lab Staff
- Ken Elliott
- Shielagh Morrison
- Murray Wilson
- Patricia Jackson
- Mel Scully
- Madison Burns
- Wendy Jayme Lovell
- Jennie Carsfield
- David Bailey
- Janet Franklin
- Harry Blackwell
- Douglas Ovila Casey
- Destinations International Annual Convention 2022 Toronto
- Neil Saha
- Maria de Lourdes
- Vitola Dacol
- Cecylia Idzi

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