

A green rectangular graphic with a repeating pattern of stylized leaves. In the center is a white rectangular box containing the text "FOREST RELEAF OF MISSOURI" in a bold, green, serif font, and "IMPACT STORIES" in a smaller, green, serif font below it.

FOREST RELEAF OF MISSOURI IMPACT STORIES

"I find the most joy in my life going outside. Camping, hiking, anything and everything outdoors. I love being on a hammock. All of those things aren't possible without trees."

-Abby Mack

Spanning Distances

When she was old enough to share a height with the trees that were being planted, Abby Mack participated in her first tree planting event. That tree planting had been organized by her father, and that community experience allowed Abby to plant trees that would grow alongside her. Now as a college student, Abby remarks how huge the trees are and fondly recalls that distant day she planted them.

As the service chair of Tau Lambda Sigma, a service sorority chapter at Truman State University, it was Abby's responsibility to make sure all sorority members achieved 20 hours of service during the semester. However, it was the height of the Covid pandemic and people weren't focused on fulfilling service hours, so it was imperative to find a fun, yet socially distant activity. Remembering the joy she experienced as a child, Abby decided that a tree planting would be an exciting way to encourage those service hours. When she shared the idea, Abby was delighted to get a positive response.

Abby found Forest Releaf and ordered twenty trees to plant on public land through Project CommuniTree. The only challenge was the distance. Since Forest ReLeaf's nursery is located in Creve Coeur Park, the trees would need to be driven three hours away to Kirksville, where Truman State is located. To solve this challenge Abby offered extra service hours to anyone who would be in St. Louis over fall break and would be willing to bring some of the trees back to campus. Five volunteers agreed and all twenty trees made their way to Truman campus.

On a brisk morning in November 2022, thirty-five sorority members began their day by planting the trees. Despite the cold, five trees were planted at a nearby church and the other fifteen were planted on campus. Some of those on campus were strategically placed near the Humane Society to provide shade for when the shelter dogs are taken on walks.

Although she is no longer the service chair for Tau Lambda Sigma, Abby made sure that her successor knew of this project. A vital component of the CommuniTree program is recognizing the care a baby tree requires. By passing the baton, Abby's tree planting event continues to span distances, providing service hours to future sorority sisters as they steward the trees and grow their own connections to them. Abby summed up why trees are able to span time and space with these words, "I find the most joy in my life going outside. Camping, hiking, anything and everything outdoors. I love being on hammock. All of those things aren't possible without trees."



