

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

FOREST RELEAF OF MISSOURI IMPACT STORIES

"Trees are just a constant source of inspiration and joy, but also a mystery when you wonder about how old they are; how long they've been here; how they got here; how the area looked when this tree first started growing."

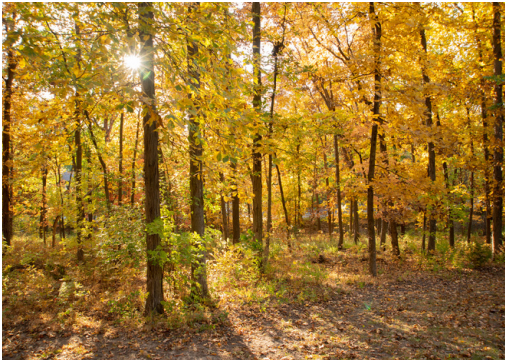
- Stephen Bybee

From Invasives to Natives

When Stephen Bybee began his work at Columbia's Kiwanis Park in 2021, the park was filled with invasive bush honeysuckle. To remediate the state of the park, Stephen held work days for volunteers to aid in the honeysuckle removal. As the removal efforts succeeded, the park gained empty space that could be retaken by the invasive species, or it could be used for the planting of adaptive and beneficial native plants.

Stephen deliberately chose the latter and connected with Forest ReLeaf to acquire thirty native trees and shrubs for the park. The newly founded Missouri Conservation Corps hosted the planting event, and with the help of over twenty volunteers the new trees and shrubs were planted on the west side of Kiwanis Park on October 16th, 2022. Stephen had many aspirations for this planting. The tree planting started as a mission to restore Kiwanis Park, but as it developed, it also provided educational opportunities for the community while inviting people to green spaces. What resulted, as Stephen puts it, "was not only restoring the native environment, but also restoring the community."

The newly planted white oaks and dogwoods will not only add beauty to the area, but they will also prevent the return of an invasive species, all while creating a plentiful food source for wildlife. As these trees continue to grow, so will Stephen's hope for Kiwanis Park. Most recently he hopes the native trees will inspire others to embrace native plants and encourage them to spend more time in local green spaces.



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