



**FOREST RELEAF  
OF MISSOURI**  
IMPACT STORIES

**"When it's warm, everyone comes to hang out under the redbud tree."**

**-Karen Norman**

## **ReLeaf in the Shade**

"Shade is a really important thing," Karen Norman told me when I first visited Mason Elementary in early March 2022. Twelve years ago there wasn't any shade at this school and the classrooms along the south facing wall were getting blasted by the sun. Karen's husband works for Missouri Botanical Garden and is into sustainability, so naturally Karen, an art teacher at Mason for 24 years, decided to take matters into her own hands. She found out that the school could get free trees through Forest ReLeaf. She ordered 6 trees and 12 shrubs, and she knew she would be planting the majority of them along that south facing wall. There was only one voice of resistance to planting the new trees, Karen recalled. The PE teacher wanted space on the lawn for PE and Karen matter-of-factly informed that teacher to "play around the trees".

Despite her success to win over the PE teacher, Mrs. Norman admitted that keeping the kids from banging on and destroying the trees before they fully established was the hardest part about the tree planting. Still, it didn't deter her from ordering more trees for a second planting a few years later. Now all the trees are established. Next to the blacktop which doubles as a playground stands a very large, very established redbud in the small courtyard. "When it's warm, everyone comes to hang out under the redbud tree like you wouldn't believe," Karen proudly stated. Teachers today benefit from the trees by taking students on nature walks right on the school grounds. And although there is currently no science teacher, when there was, he would do tree identification with the students.

For twelve years, Forest ReLeaf trees have been positively impacting students at Mason Elementary. And in 2019, they had the opportunity to impact many more. "We had our 100th

anniversary and when alumni came back to visit they were like 'Oh my gosh, I don't remember that!' These trees are just beautiful."



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