

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

"I think that there's probably no closer place to God than out in nature. I always say that even if I'm just out watering or planting something, I'm in my happy place. It feels good to plant something and watch it grow and nurture it."

-Pam Franke

The (Wo)man Who Planted Trees

Pam Franke looked about her subdivision and admired the mature trees. Then it dawned on her that although these trees were being managed well, there weren't any young trees. What would happen when these trees all matured to the point of death? No younger trees would be ready to take their place. Pam knew she had to act; she took it upon herself to plant new trees, not unlike the French fable 'The Man Who Planted Trees'.

Pam knew that MODOT owned the land she hoped to plant in. She met with them to review plans and to apply for a permit to plant on the property, which she renews yearly. In the beginning, she would shop sales and slowly add a few trees here and there. When Pam found out about Forest ReLeaf in 2019, she immediately envisioned the success of the partnership. She suddenly had access to free trees and her tree planting efforts progressed quickly. Pam planted in small batches, making multiple trips in her car to get all the trees; sometimes she rented a van or truck; other times, she recruited volunteers to fill up their cars as well. Each time, she was adding to the number of young trees on the land. She estimates that she has planted over 200 trees.

Like the French fable, Pam was mindful about her planting locations. She could tell that some areas were higher and drier, while others were lower and swampier. Seeking advice, Pam had met with Forest ReLeaf staff to learn about "right tree, right place". It was also important to Pam to place protective caging around the young trees that may otherwise be

browsed by deer or lost to mower damage caused by the large riding mowers used on MODOT land.

Pam's stewardship for these trees did not end there. These young trees were thirsty and far from water, so Pam's husband designed a wagon for the back of Pam's electric bike. This wagon would carry water jugs to quench the young trees' thirst. With 1-2 gallons of water per tree, the watering trips would take as long as eight hours. At least once a week, and twice in exceptionally hot weeks, Pam would be taking trips all day from a water source to the newly planted trees.

Pam plans to plant forty more trees before dedicating herself solely to maintenance. She also shares that she has "hopefully planted things that are going to survive and thrive without having an irrigation system." She continues to say "I hope that it cleans the air, helps the animals, and shields the subdivision from wind and noise. I'm hopeful that they'll grow up and somebody will be able to enjoy the benefits of them."



