



**“Have you seen those colorful wrappings on the trees in Fairground Park? I slow down as I drive by to look at them. They are eye-catching!”**

**-Dicie Morant, Ville resident**

## **Mti Wraps @ Fairground Park**

Mti Wraps @ Fairground Park is a community-centered, outdoor public project erected in North St. Louis City by artist Dail Chambers. It responds to the need for increasing tree survival rates during establishment, particularly at Fairground Park, where newly planted trees have struggled to survive. Secondly, it responds to a community’s desire for beauty, while creating opportunities for engagement that serve all ages and varied abilities.

“Mti” (pronounced m-tee) means tree in Swahili. Trees in public spaces not only beautify, but offer many health benefits to the community, such as shade, improved mental health and the reduction of asthma. However, trees in public spaces are vulnerable to mower damage, vandalism and even theft. Mti Wraps @ Fairground Park is a means to solve both a forestry need and a community need.

In African culture, the practice of tree wrapping is a community event. Large baobab trees dominate the landscape, and in order to wrap one, many hands join together in *ujima*, that is collective work. Mti Wraps @ Fairground Park was similarly created. It also incorporates *kuumba*, or creativity. By repurposing donated fabric scraps and broken garden hoses, otherwise destined for the landfill, the project creatively incorporates the idea of sustainability. *Umoja*, or unity, is achieved through coming together to create art.

Tree planting in a city park can be a difficult undertaking often met with compacted clay soil, limiting who can participate. The Mti Wraps project brought together the entire community, young and old and those with varied abilities. Each hand had a vital role in the project's completion. Aesthetic and functionality combined to bring both color and pride to the neighborhood environment.

Dail was inspired by a tree wrapping of a baobab tree in Africa. She was exposed to this work by the late Ismima Nebtkata, a Saint Louis based community artist who worked in fiber arts. This African based, multi-cultural practice has inspired people all across the globe to create their own version. Mti Wraps @ Fairground Park is upcycled art. Donated fabric and garden hoses come from perennial stl, Urban Harvest and A.C.R.E.S.



