

Milestones and new beginnings

As we turn the page to 2021, many people take a moment around this time to reflect and rekindle the embers of a fresh start.

Our natural surroundings can serve as a reminder of this process. Sprouting plants and budding trees signal new beginnings.

Our industry plays an important role in that process. Many trees that once were young have grown to become community landmarks, marking important milestones. They become tethers to our shared history, and symbols of our strength and resilience.

Roots of history, branches of growth

When I think of trees that have become regional or national symbols, several come to mind.

One of the most famous is the **Liberty Tree** in Boston. This elm stood near Boston Common in the years before our nation's fight for independence. It became a rallying point for the American colonies and a symbol of a determined resistance to the English Crown.

In nearby Connecticut, the **Charter Oak** once stood in Hartford. Nestled in the Wylls Hyll, this unusually large, 1,000-year-old white oak tree fell in a storm in 1856.

My wife is from that state, and we made the trek to visit the monument where the tree once stood (as everyone does at some point). I callously said, "OK, cool, a big tree on the ground where somebody hid a note — and why are we here?" (Not smart, by the way).

Turns out the "note" hidden in the tree was the Royal Charter of 1662, signed by King Charles II, which granted the colony of Connecticut some self-governance rights. In 1687, King James II decided to revoke the royal charters issued to colonies. Connecticut leaders decided to hide their charter where they hoped English authorities wouldn't find it. The tree became a symbol of our fight for independence.

In New York City, the **Survivor Tree** stands near the 9/11 Memorial & Museum as a living reminder of resilience, survival and rebirth.

Crews excavating the rubble in the searing aftermath of the September 11, 2001 ter-

rorist attacks discovered a severely damaged Callery pear tree, with snapped roots and burned and broken branches. I recall at the time the wonder that the tree survived at all.

Workers carefully removed the tree from the site and turned it over to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. In 2010, following a long rehabilitation, the tree was returned to the Ground Zero site and made part of the memorial. The symbolism of its gnarled trunk sprouting fresh branches is powerful.

But sometimes, it's not just one tree.

In Washington, D.C., the **National Cherry Blossom Festival** takes place in late March and early April. It commemorates the gift of approximately 3,000 cherry trees from the mayor of Tokyo to the United States in 1912. The gift celebrated the friendship between the Japanese and American people. The trees were planted mainly around the Tidal Basin.

The festival attracts hundreds of thousands of people to our nation's capital each year. Peak bloom occurs when 70% of the Yoshino cherry trees are open.

Sometimes, these trees pass into history. This summer, Northwesterners mourned the demise of the **Old Apple Tree** in Vancouver, Washington at 194 years old — an unusually long life. It was believed to be the oldest apple tree in the Pacific Northwest.

The tree was planted from seed in 1826 at Fort Vancouver, a fur-trading outpost established by the Hudson's Bay Company, and became a symbol of Washington's apple industry. It survived the closing of the fort, the brutal Columbus Day ice storm of 1962, and the construction of nearby freeways, but a worsening split in the trunk finally disabled the tree's circulation system and killed it.

A fenced enclosure and plaque still remain, along with the decaying stump. According to the *Columbian* newspaper, Vancouver arborists have nurtured root suckers growing around and from the tree, with an eye toward selecting one as an ultimate replacement.

A nation rediscovers plants and trees

Although 2020 is a year none of us want to repeat, it had a bright spot for nurseries. The general public rediscovered the joy of the outdoor living space.

Some of this was due to people being



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cooped up at home (I'll call this "the Stone family example"). They looked with derision at the state of their yards and decided, "Dang it, it's time to do something about it." For others, gardening provided a positive activity to provide tangible beauty, mere steps away.

For years, the OAN has promoted gardening to consumers through its ongoing Plant Something Oregon campaign, newsletter and website (www.PlantSomethingOregon.com). The materials explain the physical, mental and environmental benefits of plants and trees. They encourage gardening as something families can do together — no matter what is happening at work, school or the community.

Axiom, a marketing firm, pulled together a 2021 gardening insights survey, available on the Internet (tinyurl.com/yc5yna6v) and I highly recommend reading it. It found that an astounding 86% of homeowners flocked to gardening, and 50% indicated they will plant more next year and expand their garden.

Best of all, these new or renewed gardeners built their confidence. According to the report, "more than 80% of those surveyed said they felt successful or very successful in their 2020 gardening tasks."

"This is great news for the horticulture industry," the report stated. "When homeowners feel successful, they buy more plants, are more likely to try new types of gardening and expand their knowledge. These are all signs that 2021 will be another busy year."

I share this optimism. The nursery and greenhouse industry will experience new beginnings and growth in 2021. We will build new connections, new icons, new symbols of our resilience. Seeing the love of gardening renewed provides me with optimism for the coming year. ☺