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President and Publisher Dennis Francis  
Editorial Page Editor Lucy Young-Oda

lyoungoda@staradvertiser.com  
808-529-4831

Deputy Editorial Page Editor Stephen J. Downes

Editorial Page Staff Betty Shimabukuro / Vicki Viotti

OAHU PUBLICATIONS INC.

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# Arbor Day is a chance to act on the benefits of trees

By Anna Lauren Lerner

Trees are one of the most important tools in combating climate change — the most pressing issue of our day as conveyed by the recent COP26. Yet, here in Honolulu, we are cutting down trees at an astronomical rate, straggling behind other cities with only a 20% tree canopy cover. Through satellite GPS, it was discovered that more than 76,000 trees had been cut down in just four years.

Despite various tree planting initiatives, each year Hawaii loses more trees than planted. Large trees are cut down and there is a general antipathy toward trees “causing rubbish.” We must stop this war on trees.

On Hawaii Arbor Day, being observed today, we can take action to not only plant, but preserve trees that took decades to grow into the canopy that we enjoy.

Hawaii Arbor Day began on Nov. 3, 1905, when Territorial Gov. George Carter commemorated the occasion by planting a breadfruit tree. November was chosen because it’s the beginning of the rainy season, a good time to plant. Queen Liliuokalani herself visited Lahainaluna and planted a royal palm, stating “as that tree grows up in strength and beauty, so I hope that they (the children) will grow also, strong and noble, and that they will be a pride to their parents, to the school and the country.”

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt created National Arbor Day, choosing April when trees are in their full glory. Appreciation for trees spans cultures and time. An-

## ISLAND VOICES



Anna Lauren Lerner is a Punahou School senior and ecoleader of the Sustainability Club leading the K-12 Tree Campus Designation.

cient Chinese believe the peach tree symbolizes longevity, Japanese revere the pine and bamboo as evidenced by our tradition of kadomatsu. Swedish considered the cosmos “Yggdrasil” a tree, and the kukui nut represents guidance and enlightenment.

So when did we stop appreciating trees?

Perhaps we've forgotten their many benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

many rediscovered the healing effects of nature. Research concludes trees reduce stress and boost immunity. Trending in Japan is forest bathing, shinrin-yoku, being immersed in the sight, sound and smell of the forest is used as

“a preventative self care in response to stressful conditions of living in an urbanized society.” In fact, Forest Bathing Hawaii is recommended by Forbes, New York Times and NatGeo as one of the best experiences in Hawaii.

We know that trees serve as a “carbon sink,” the liver of our planet, absorbing polluting gases and filtering particulates. Trees become crucial on an island recharging our ever-depleting aquifers, enabling rain and surface water to infiltrate the ground, slowing erosion and acidification of coral reefs. They protect us from UV rays, reduce heat, and lessen dependence on air conditioning. In a state concerned with diabetes, tree-shaded streets encourage people to walk and jog more and that interaction encourages a sense of community.

Beauty of trees impact property. Studies show that homes landscaped with trees sell more

quickly and for more than homes without trees and on an entire street lined with trees, homes can be worth as much as 25% more. People shop and linger at malls longer when trees are present.

We have a chance with Hawaii Arbor Day to act. To start, visit your nearest botanical garden, then get involved. There are many organizations in Hawaii doing good work and more initiatives on the way. Just join up! The Outdoor Circle, Malama O Manoa and Smart Trees Pacific help with adopt-a-tree giveaway events. Want to create a better neighborhood? Trees for Honolulu's Future's “Trees for Kaimuki” is a model for communities. Kaulunani's Citizen Forester Program, an award-winning tree-plotting program, certifies citizen foresters.

This Arbor Day, remember: Plant and protect ... it's cooler with trees.