



# prologue.

## A massive ice storm ravaged the campus, reducing trees to twigs. It's time to begin again.

**A**s Oklahomans, we know all about ice. Other places get fluffy, white snow; we get ice. But the ice storm that struck the state on December 10, 2007, was not just any ice storm; it was an event of historic proportions. When residents could navigate the streets that first morning and in the days to follow, they found that they had lost more than electricity. Power lines were down—but so were the trees—thousands of them.

Norman was hit particularly hard, and the devastation on the University of Oklahoma campus was enough to break your heart. Terms like “war zone” and “tornado aftermath” were used to describe the scene. Grand old Lacebark and Siberian elms and Shumard oaks, some that had graced the campus from its early days, were halved, even quartered, their great limbs severed from trunks that in some cases looked more like poles than trees. Even younger ornamental trees were bent to the ground with the weight of the ice, many not to spring up again when their burdens finally melted. (Photos from the storm appear on Page 14.)

On the Norman campus alone, without counting the North Campus, the golf course and contractual properties, more than 1,000 trees were lost. On the Health Sciences Center and Tulsa campuses, the losses were smaller but still significant. Of those trees that survived, 80 percent suffered damage, much of it severe.

The landscape staff, so recently aglow in public praise for their magnificent Centennial mum displays (*Sooner Magazine*, Fall 2007), swung into action, arriving at 3 a.m. on the morning of the storm, hauling away ice-laden debris and clearing the way for safe travel through

the campus. They volunteered to work on through the Christmas break, taking off Christmas Day and New Year's Day only when landscape director Allen King insisted that they needed a break. The chain saws have run non-stop day after day, while stumps await their turn with the grinders.

Removal of the large debris left behind a mountain of leaves, twigs and smaller branches. On January 26, the call went out to OU students willing to donate their Saturday morning to “Rake It Up” Day. More than 1,000 responded, joined by members of the faculty and staff. So many volunteered that the organizers had to send for double the amount of rakes and leaf bags they had expected to use. King estimates that 10,000 stuffed bags went to the special collection site that day alone.

The site itself was created on South Campus to receive the storm debris. Once the campus is restored, King explains that the dump site also must be cleared—at a cost of \$100,000.

The cleanup costs—labor, equipment and materials—have been enormous—approximately \$300,000 by the end of February and up to \$500,000 at completion. An experienced arborist will be needed to salvage the damaged trees, a projected two-year process. King cannot put a value on the lost trees, which he has tended lovingly for two decades, but when the replacement cost is added, the storm damage to the Norman campus will total approximately \$1.7 million.

The ice had barely melted before the inevitable question began to be asked by those who had witnessed the transformation of OU's campus into a horticultural destination point during the David Boren administration. “Is Molly going to launch a campaign to replace the trees?”

Even the questioners already knew the answer: Oh, yes; she certainly was.

First Lady Molly Shi Boren's unflagging devotion to the campus landscaping programs is legendary. Within days she was at work with the appropriate University staff on a plan to “begin again.” OU Regent Jon R. Stuart of Tulsa and his wife, Dee Dee, came forward with a \$500,000 challenge grant for what Mrs. Boren calls the Reforestation Campaign. Letters went out to alumni and friends of the institution, along with press releases in state newspapers. The response in just the first two weeks has been remarkable.

Speed is important for this effort to succeed. If the new trees are to take hold, they must be planted in early spring. To maximize the effect of the donated funds, planners are focusing on trees of less than 4-inch caliper, which can be installed without the use of heavy equipment.

Since 1997, President and Mrs. Boren have led the campus community in the observance of Arbor Day with speeches, a picnic, tree planting and a special honoree, all in the spirit of the pioneer president, David Ross Boyd, OU's Johnny Appleseed. This year's recovery from the perfect ice storm requires an Arbor Week, and the 2008 honoree, selected long before the present crisis, is Molly Shi Boren. One has to imagine that Dr. Boyd would approve. —CJB

*Sooner Magazine readers wishing to participate in the Reforestation Campaign can send contributions to OU Foundation, 100 Timberdell Road, Norman, OK 73019-0685, by check, American Express, Mastercard, Visa or Discover, specifying the fund, and including the donor's name, address, credit card company and card number, expiration date and amount.*