

**Address on Behalf of the Campus Beautification and Stewardship Subcommittee  
Arbor Day Celebration**

Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia

17 February 2012

What is a tree? To a biologist with a reductionist bent, it is an organism composed of the organs root, stem, and leaf, which in turn are composed of the tissues parenchyma, xylem, phloem, and periderm – in turn composed of various cells – in turn composed of various organelles. To a chemist, a tree is perhaps little more than a source of products like cellulose, gums, and resins. To a philosopher or poet a tree is often imbued with more abstract qualities. I think most would agree that a tree is a very different thing to one motivated strictly by profit or some other short-term objective, than it is to the conservationist. When inclined to think we can always replace trees through replanting efforts, we ought to consider one simple question: How long does it take to grow a 250 year old tree?

Some of the largest longleaf pines on our campus are more than 200 years old. These living organisms have grown from seeds that germinated before our nation began. Most of the longleaf pine specimens in the remnant grove along Georgia Avenue are at least 125 years old. Longleaf pines of such an age are indeed rare, and I see precious little evidence that modern humans, obsessed with instant gratification and motivated by profit, will resist temptations – whatever our motivation – to allow individuals of longleaf pine to reach such a grand state of maturity. These trees, living organisms, are a part of our natural heritage, an invaluable remnant of what once was and will likely never be again.

Occasionally, there has been tension between faculty serving on the Campus Beautification and Stewardship Subcommittee (CBSS) and the university administration. But no doubt there would be fewer *old trees* surviving on our campus without this tension, without a sometimes contentious faculty contending for this remnant of our natural heritage. I say this only as a reminder that we faculty must continue to be vigilant, and must continue to work with the administration and its representatives to preserve this invaluable natural resource and the beauty it brings to our campus. In recent years the CBSS has worked closely with representatives of the VSU administration to minimize tree losses during the construction of Georgia Hall, Jennett Hall, and the Student Health Center, and has sponsored the installation of the native plant garden adjacent to Bailey Science Center and the pinetum along One Mile Branch.

The CBSS is an arm of the Environmental Issues Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate. The CBSS originated from the Whitehead Beautification Committee, which was formed to advise the administration on management of Mrs. Jewell Whitehead's camellia garden and the fund she bequeathed the University to insure the preservation of that garden

and to further beautification efforts on the Valdosta State campus. Professor Wayne R. Faircloth was a longtime chair of the Whitehead Beautification Committee, and, as such, he was instrumental in drafting the first campus tree preservation policy. That policy has subsequently undergone a number of revisions before and since being formally adopted as University policy by the Faculty Senate in 1993. Currently known as the Tree Preservation and Maintenance Policy, it is now an integral component of Valdosta State's Environmental Management Plan.

I am pleased to accept this award as a member of the CBSS on behalf of the committee and all who have served on the committee and its precursor – the Whitehead Beautification Committee. It is fitting that I mention again the role Professor Faircloth played in the early years and the tireless efforts of Professor Brad Bergstrom, a longtime member of the committee and its current chair, and those who played vital roles in bringing shared governance to Valdosta State through the formation of the Faculty Senate.

Thank you on behalf of the CBSS.

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