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For Immediate Release – November 6, 2017

Volunteers Plant Iconic American Chestnut Trees in Northampton

A cross-generational partnership of two Northampton residents brought to life 16 rare American chestnut tree seedlings that will be planted in three public Northampton locations.

The Bridge Street Cemetery, Childs Park, and the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area will receive young American chestnut tree seedlings as part of an effort to return these iconic American trees to their native landscape. In coordination with Northampton's Tree Warden Rich Parasiliti, volunteers will plant eight trees in the historic section of the Bridge Street Cemetery on Wednesday November 8 at 2:30pm.

In spring 2017, Steve Jones, a retired public health physician, age 76, collaborated with Madeleine Lombard, age 16, to propagate American chestnut seeds that he acquired from the American Chestnut Foundation. The American chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*) dominated the New England forest until a lethal Asian fungus virtually wiped them out. The American Chestnut Foundation has been working for three decades to develop a disease-resistant variety through hybridization and selective breeding. The 16 seeds that Lombard grew contain genetic stock that is 94% American chestnut, and 6% Chinese chestnut, and thought to be blight-resistant.

Lombard, a self-described "plant nerd" who spent last summer as an intern with the Smith College Botanical Garden, germinated and tended the young seedlings at her home in Northampton. She used special planting medium and 18 inch deep pots that accommodate taproots. Lombard also took care to protect the infant trees from squirrels that love to dig up and feed on chestnuts. All 16 chestnuts germinated and survived their first growing season.

Lombard and Jones approached the Public Shade Tree Commission this fall offering to plant the young trees in Northampton public spaces. The Public Shade Tree Commission and Tree Warden chose the Bridge Street Cemetery for its historic significance and expansive, park-like grounds, both of which seemed fitting for trees that were once known as the "Sequoias of the East". A metal cage will surround each seedling to protect it from wildlife and mowers.

Later this month, volunteers will plant four chestnut seedlings in the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area. They are also gifting trees for planting in Childs Park.

For Additional Information:

Madeleine Lombard, 413-207-5899

Steve Jones, 413-320-9417

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