


Special Trees for a Sacred Place



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Looking across Upper New York Bay, Manhattan's skyscrapers rise spectrally in the dense  morning fog. We volunteers take to shovels and began digging holes virtually within the shadow of the Statue of Liberty on tiny Liberty Island. The morning isn't particularly hot, but it's humid enough for blotches of sweat to blossom on the grey Project Evergreen tee shirts of some of the more energetic workers in our group of volunteers. About 40 of us in all had ferried to the island from nearby Ellis Island for a community service project months in the planning by Project Evergreen.

Project Evergreen is a 501c3 non-profit organization based in Cleveland, Ohio. Its mission is to communicate with the public about the healing, environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of well-maintained green spaces. Many green industry suppliers, companies and their friends support Project Evergreen and its goals.

That's certainly the case the morning of Tuesday, June 10, that finds me and the other volunteers at the 911 Memorial Grove on Liberty Island. Regional companies donated equipment, their time, supplies and even brought employees and family members to make short work of the project.


We are busy planting 12 London plane trees. We are planting these healthy trees to replace 12 mature London plane trees killed or badly damaged as a result of Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. It is hard to imagine 7.4-acre Liberty Island almost completely underwater. But it was, and in some sections by five feet of water during the height of the Sandy-driven ocean surge.

The trees we are planting are not small trees, and this is not easy work. Not for volunteers equipped with hand tools only. These are balled and burlapped three-inch caliper trees with root balls easily weighing several hundred pounds each.

Given the trees in full leaf and green grass the June morning we're working,

it's hard to imagine salty, angry waves lapping at the feet of the Statue of Liberty. Adding to the incongruity of the the Sandy disaster is the stream of visitors pouring out of crowded ferries and onto Liberty Island.

Many of the sightseers pass by our handiwork on their way to the Statue of Liberty, which is no more than 25 yards away from us. It's almost certain that few (if any) of these eager visitors had been aware of Project Evergreen prior to seeing us digging and rolling big rootballs. However, they can hardly miss the large banner, stretched between two trees, proclaiming the presence of Project Evergreen on the island or the special tee shirts that just about everybody working in the 911 Memorial Grove proudly wears.

By morning's end, the banner comes down and we join the crowd pushing onto the ferry for the short cruise back to Ellis Island. Returning to nearby Jersey City across the Bay from Manhattan we offer congratulations to each other, pick up our bags at the hotel, pack away our soiled Project Evergreen tee shirts. Then we're off our off to our jobs or homes. 

What we leave behind of ourselves on Liberty Island are the 12 handsome new London plane trees in the 9/11 Memorial Grove. We took care in planting them so we hope that visitors to Liberty Island and the Statue of Liberty will enjoy them for many years.

Hopefully, they will also stop to take a minute to read the two small bronze plaques telling them of the significance of the 911 Memorial Grove. The newer one of the two plaques reminds them that the Grove was restored by Project Evergreen volunteers.