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Growing a greener community

City gains recognition for its tree-planting efforts

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CLIFTON - "Urban forestry" may sound like an oxymoron, but state officials say a green canopy is a tremendous benefit in the city's urban and older suburban neighborhoods.

Trees can reduce pollution, cool summer days, raise property values and even soothe jangled nerves.

But often trees — and by extension the 11 employees who work for Clifton's Shade Tree Division — go unappreciated, says Superintendent Giuseppe Mannina.

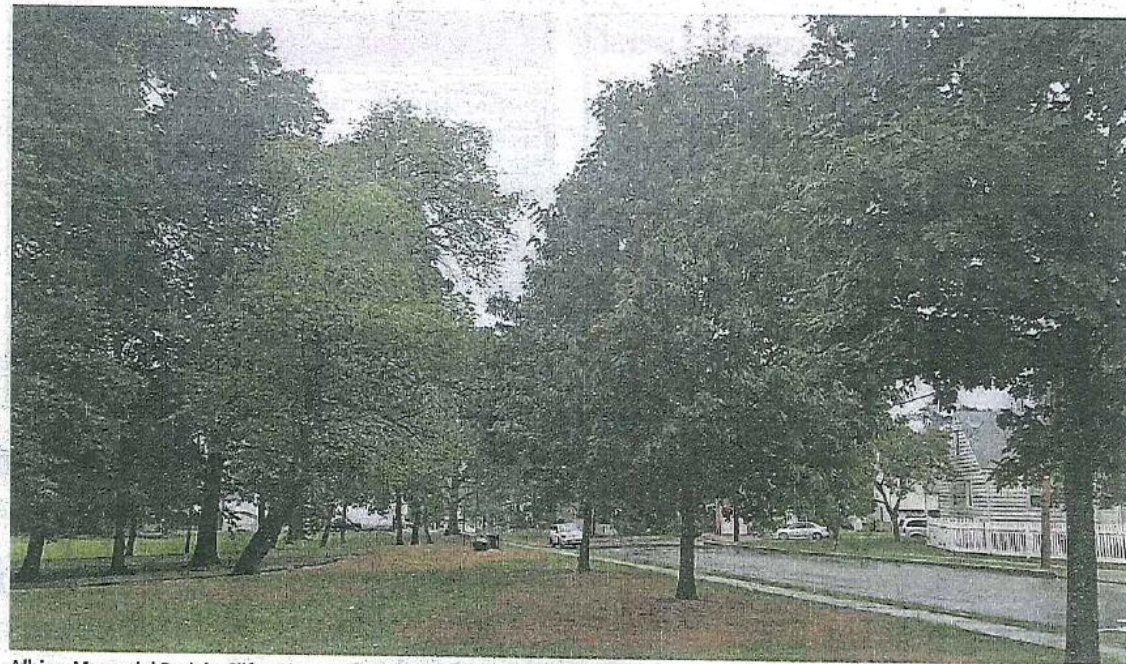
Like the time a woman wanted a large tree re-

moved from her yard. Mannina warned her that she would regret it.

"After she took it down she was upset. She agreed with me," Mannina said. "She said her house looked empty."

So it was welcome news recently when the New Jersey Forest Service recognized the city for its continued effort in making Clifton greener through thoughtful planting of trees.

Mannina, who became superintendent three years ago, is a key player in the city's long tradition of fostering trees. Some 20 years ago Clifton at-



Albion Memorial Park in Clifton is one of the parks where you can see older trees in the middle and new ones planted 10 years ago by the city along the outside of the park. PHOTO BY MATT FAGAN/NORTHJERSEY.COM

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tained Tree City USA status from the Arbor Day Foundation, which officials say is a point of civic pride and which has some very real benefits.

There are the annual saplings that are given out to residents, some of which are used by the city. Plus, city workers are regularly schooled in the

challenges of planting and maintaining trees in an urban landscape.

The growing and maintenance of trees in a city like Clifton takes work, expertise and creative thinking. Also, teaching the public.

"That's part of my job, educating people," Mannina said.

The Forest Service's Bryan McDonald noted that in cities, trees offer tremendous benefits.

"In downtown areas where there are trees,

people tend to spend more time," McDonald said — and presumably spend more money.

There are studies that suggest greenery is linked to reduced crime, he said.

He may be right. An April 2013 article in "Discover" reported that in Philadelphia, greener neighborhoods had significantly fewer crimes than nonvegetated areas, possibly because trees encourage outdoor socializing and reduce irritabil-

ity.

There are similar studies involving cities like Baltimore. There's a school of thought that while assaults and other violent crimes may drop, greenery may provide cover for thieves.

While these theories are debatable, Clifton's Recycling and Clean Communities Coordinator Al DuBois said what's not in dispute is that trees provide shade, absorb carbon dioxide and harmful pollutants, and release

oxygen. These factors work to reduce the effects of climate change.

As a bonus, a leafy neighborhood tends to increase home values.

Over the years, whenever Clifton has improved major roadways like Allwood Road (where trees were added in the median) it has included plans for trees, Mayor James Anzaldi noted.

"They look good," among other benefits, the mayor said. "It is a quality of life issue."

DuBois said he'd like to see a median with trees along Clifton Avenue between Van Houten Avenue and Allwood Road. It would take a lot of effort coordinating between the state and local government, but the end result would be worth the effort, he said.

Mannina said the Tree City designation has provided his team the knowledge to manage the thousands of trees growing throughout the city.

For instance, a recent \$10,000 grant will let the city inventory its trees to determine their health and varieties. This may be no small matter, since New Jersey's ash trees are being devastated by the emerald ash borer and will have to be replaced.

Carrie Sargeant, the state Urban and Community Forestry Program coordinator, said the inventory will address "high-priority maintenance needs and vacant planting sites inventory," and guide planting projects.

Mannina said his crews cut down as many as four trees a day, trim 1,200 during a given year, and plant as many as 600 in a year.

With Clifton undertaking a number of road improvement projects, more trees have been removed because of root damage. "Cut more than 35 to 45 percent of the roots, and the tree is not safe," Mannina said.

Cutting roots can be a big deal. Get a storm like Superstorm Sandy, where the city lost an estimated 2,500 trees, and a strong root system may make all the difference, he said. As does the removal of dead branches in evergreens, which can act like sails in high winds, Mannina said.

The superintendent noted that for years it was not uncommon to plant trees between the curbs and sidewalks. But the roots can destroy sidewalks. Now they are more commonly planted away from power lines, in yards if possible.