

A tree grows in Stockbridge

American elms helped by local

By Ellen G. Lahr
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STOCKBRIDGE — There is something about the historic American elm tree that has captured the passion of Tom Zetterstrom for years — and the Tri-Town Rotary has joined his cause.

An environmental advocate and president of Elm Watch in Great Barrington, Zetterstrom has led efforts since 1999 to reintroduce more than 100 of the graceful giants into Berkshire County and Litchfield County in Connecticut.

The Tri-Town Rotary, in celebration



Ellen Lahr / Berkshire Eagle Staff

of the 100th birthday of Rotary International, is sponsoring the planting of elms in Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge to provide something lasting, perhaps as long as another 100 years.

Lee has a new tree already, and Lenox will receive one next year, outside the newly refurbished Lenox Library.

The tree now standing at the Norman Rockwell Museum was an \$850 project,

Left, a new American elm is planted at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge. Kim Rawson, left, assistant communications director for the Rockwell Museum; Myron Lipinski, president of Tri-Town Rotary; Roger Levine, Tri-Town Rotary member; Tom Zetterstrom of Elm Watch, and Selectwoman Deborah McMenemy, right, stand by the tree.

Zetterstrom said.

The native New England elms were decimated by disease in the last century, but disease-resistant varieties are now taking root, in part through citizen groups such as Elm Watch, with its "Adopt an Elm" program.

The new trees are fast-growing,

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Local environmentalist aids the elm

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shade-giving, weather-resistant and visually pleasing, with their vase-shaped contour and weeping branches, from mature heights of more than 100 feet, said Zetterstrom.

And, free of disease, they last.

Speaking to Rotary members and museum staff in a grassy park spot outside the museum, Zetterstrom gave some local history on the subject of the planned elm planting effort, which has roots in Sheffield.

He said the town of Sheffield can claim distinction as the "earliest example of public tree planting and environmental activism," dat-

ing to 1837.

That year, in a span of three days, townsfolk planted 1,000 elms throughout the town to improve their village and provide shade. A pre-existing Sheffield elm was 400 years old when it had to be felled in 1920.

One Berkshire tree, a 143-footer in Pittsfield, was believed to be the largest in New England.

The Dutch elm disease fungus was brought to the United States in 1931 in a shipment of infected logs from France. Since the 1940s, 97 percent of the Berkshires' elm population has died.

There were some survivors, however, including a giant elm on Baldwin Hill in Egremont, which Zetterstrom said inspired formation of Elm Watch.

The elm was the original "Liberty Tree" in colonial Massachusetts and remains the official state tree.

Elm Watch notes that plant geneticists have identified the elm varieties most resistant to Dutch elm disease, and those are the ones planted by the organization.

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