



Local Oak is State's 2013 Heritage Tree

Story and Photos by Mark Shaffer

"Trees are nature's ultimate recorders of what goes on in the environment. Trees can talk. I just try and interpret what they say."

The speaker is Dr. Henri Grissino-Mayer, one of the world's foremost experts in deciphering the language of tree rings, or Dendrochronology. Grissino-Mayer heads the University of Tennessee's Laboratory of Tree Ring Science and he is to Dendrochronology what Indiana Jones is to Archeology, minus the bullwhip and fedora.

Witness to the Centuries

Written by Mark Shaffer

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It's late spring, 2010 and Mclean Hall at the Technical College of the Lowcountry is packed with a



rapt audience of professional arborists, foresters and tree lovers of all types. This is the Beaufort Three Century Project's highly anticipated Tree Symposium and it will go down as one of the organization's crowning achievements leading up to Beaufort's Tercentennial the following year. This is one result of a countywide call for projects by B3C Executive Director, Deborah Johnson. Master Arborist and then owner of Preservation Tree Care, Michael Murphy, undertook an exhaustive search for the oldest tree in Beaufort. The idea was to find trees older than the town, trees that would have born witness to those centuries.

Flash forward to December 10, 2013. A group of state and local dignitaries brave a stormy day to gather at the end of a lane leading into what was once the Cherry Hill Plantation. It is appropriately named Oak View Drive. At road's end is a marsh side meadow dominated by a grand old towering oak. A huge portion of its massive trunk is missing, the result of a lightning strike several decades ago. Beaufort City Councilman, Mike McFee, points to the scars still visible in the wood.

"That took out about two thirds of the canopy," he says.

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Still growing in the same place for over 400 years, this tree is a living witness to the centuries. It is a testament to the power of nature and the resilience of life.



The moss is a sign of a healthy, old forest. It has been growing on the tree for centuries, providing a home for many small animals and insects.



The plaque commemorates the tree's 400th birthday. It was placed here by the local historical society. The tree is a true treasure and a source of pride for the community.