

# SHADE

TREES MAKE DOLLARS AND SENSE

**ECONOMIES GROW**  
With Trees

**BUSINESSES BENEFIT**  
From Investing in Trees

**PARKS RESTORE**  
Body and Soul

**GUFC CONFERENCE**  
Key Findings

**URBAN AND  
COMMUNITY  
FORESTRY**  
Benefits of Urban Trees



# SHADE

TREES MAKE DOLLARS AND SENSE



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### Georgia Urban Forest Council (GUFC)

#### MISSION

To sustain Georgia's green legacy by helping communities grow healthy trees.

#### VISION

To be a broad based leadership resource in promoting the importance of trees throughout Georgia by leveraging user-friendly technology, influencing the policy-making process and providing cutting-edge programming.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# WELCOME TO SHADE

A publication  
that promotes how

## TREES MAKE DOLLARS AND SENSE



CITY OF ATLANTA

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January 6, 2006

Greetings:

As Mayor of Atlanta, I encourage Georgia's public and private officials to value community forests around the region.

Our trees and greenspace have a great impact on our quality of life and on our city's economic future. Centennial Park will mark its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this summer. The park has served as the catalyst and centerpiece for downtown with its growing entertainment and business districts.

If Centennial Park is an urban forestry crown jewel, then our 25 year Atlanta Beltline project will be the city's emerald necklace. This 22-mile redevelopment project will loop trails, parks and transit with Atlanta's new and existing neighborhoods and business and entertainment districts.

On behalf of the people of Atlanta, I truly believe Atlanta's future success must include more trees and greenspace.

Sincerely,

*Shirley Franklin*  
Shirley Franklin



Dear Forestry Friends:

The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) is excited about the many new partnerships and opportunities that are helping advance forest economic initiatives in our state. The theme, *Trees Make Dollars and Sense*, is timely and on-target.

Our new partnerships are increasing the understanding of tree benefits related to economic value and nature services for the forestry community. More members of our business communities — including developers, realtors and corporate leaders — need to hear our message.

GFC is a proud partner of SHADE and we encourage all to use it as a resource to educate elected leaders and decision makers in Georgia's communities. Together, we can continue to improve the breadth and conditions of our community forests.

Sincerely,

*Kenneth C. Stewart, Jr.*

Kenneth C. Stewart, Jr.  
Georgia Forestry Commission



# TREES MATTER in Georgia

# TREES MAKE Dollars and Sense

Everyone was looking for the green at the 15th annual Georgia Urban Forest Council Conference and Awards Program. Leaders from around the state gathered in Dalton on October 19 and 20, 2005, to discuss the economic and financial benefits of urban trees.

Experts presented results from scientific studies documenting and quantifying the fiscal contributions of urban forests. Some of those findings, along with other statistics, are highlighted on these pages.



**3** trees located strategically around your house can cut air conditioning bills in half. On a larger scale, the cooling effects of trees can save millions of energy dollars.

— *Trees Atlanta*

A single large tree can add \$1,000 to \$2,000 to the value of a home or business. In several studies across the country, a well landscaped property adds an average of 15% to the value of the property.

— *University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences*

People claim they are willing to spend up to 12% more for identical goods and services in businesses located on tree-lined streets versus comparable businesses on streets with no trees.

— *Kathy Wolf, College of Forest Resources at the University of Washington*

Trees absorb and store an annual average of 13 pounds of carbon each year. Community trees across the United States store 6.5 million tons per year, resulting in a savings of \$22 billion in control costs.

— *Trees Atlanta*

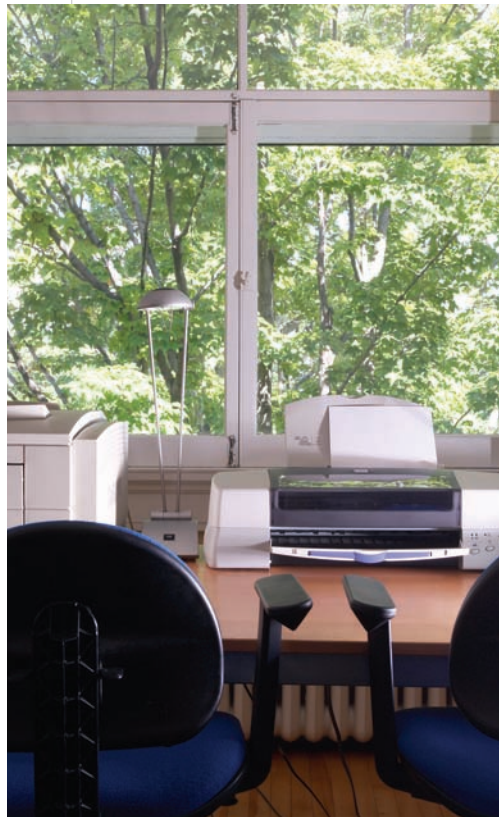
In one urban park, tree canopy cover was found to remove daily 48 pounds of particulates, 9 pounds of nitrogen dioxide, 6 pounds of sulfur dioxide and 0.5 pounds of carbon monoxide, providing a value of \$136 per day, based on pollution control technology.

— *University of Georgia*



**Streets with little or no shade need to be repaved twice as often as those with tree cover.**

— *Center for Urban Forest Research*



Workers without a view of nature from their desks reported 23% more instances of illnesses than those with a view of greenery. They also reported higher levels of frustration and irritability. Those with a view of nature reported better overall health, greater enthusiasm for their jobs, less frustration and feelings of higher life satisfaction.

— *Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, University of Michigan*

A 50% reduction in the size of home lots results in a 25% reduction in the cost of services for the city or county.

— *Jeffrey Dorfman, the Land Use Studies Initiative at the University of Georgia*

Both business/commercial land and farm/forest land pay more than \$1 in taxes for every \$1 they get back in services. However, residential land costs more in services than it pays in revenues. So when a county cuts down trees or converts farmland to build a subdivision, it is actually poorer.

— *Jeffrey Dorfman, the Land Use Studies Initiative at the University of Georgia*

To meet state sewer standards, the City of Atlanta is spending \$240 million to counter effects associated with the loss of tree canopy.

— *Trees Atlanta*



# Planting a Strong ECONOMY

**I**n the past, when legislators or city planners looked at a tree, they typically saw a trunk, some branches and a mass of green leaves. Today, more and more are seeing another kind of green — a kind that has nothing to do with chlorophyll.

Indeed, a growing body of scientific research and studies shows that trees provide measurable economic benefits to cities, counties and states. Trees bring in income by generating jobs, boosting property values and attracting educated white-collar workers. But their biggest contribution might be in lowering expenses by the free work they provide as public utilities — purifying the water, cleaning the air, cooling the temperatures and promoting public health.

Show me the money, you say? A single large 40-year-old tree pays back taxpayers and homeowners nearly \$200 per year just in its cleansing and cooling effect on the air, water and land, according to Dr. Greg McPherson, director of the Center for Urban Forest Research. Imagine the return for a residential neighborhood with 500 trees. Or a town with a few thousand trees. Or a state with millions.

“Trees have to make dollars to make sense for communities,” says Ken Stewart, director of the Georgia Forestry Commission. “And we have more and more evidence that they do, in fact, make dol-

lars. They are a huge resource for Georgia, and not just because we have more commercial forestland than any other state in the country. They provide tremendous — though under-appreciated — value through the health, social, environmental and energy benefits they provide.”

## Generating green

Trees are vital to Georgia’s economy, providing an important source of jobs and income in the state. “The figure we usually hear is 1% to 2% of Georgia’s economy is in forestry production, and that’s true,” says Jeffrey Dorfman, co-director of the Land Use Studies Initiative at the University of Georgia. “But when you look at processing, furniture making and everything all the way through the chain, by the time we are finished consuming it, all the jobs involved come to much more than that.”

And the potential for income is even greater if forestry’s waste products were converted for energy use. “Georgia produces 33 million dry tons a year of woody waste,” says Stewart. “If we could convert this to energy, 19% of Georgia’s annual energy needs could be met.”

But beyond their value as forestry products and by-products, trees can be lucrative in other ways. For one thing, they have been proven to boost property





values. “Research done in Athens, Georgia, showed that a large front-yard tree added almost 1% to the sales price of a single family home,” says McPherson. “Other studies have shown that property values of homes adjacent to parks and open spaces are typically about 8% to 20% higher than comparable properties elsewhere.”

Trees attract tourists. Callaway Gardens, Savannah’s historic parks, the North Georgia mountains and the Okefenokee swamp all draw visitors to the state. “I don’t have exact figures, but I do know nature-based tourism accounts for a large part of the state’s total tourism industry,” says Julia Murray, spokesperson for the Georgia Nature-Based Tourism Association.

And increasingly, trees lure workers. Indeed, sociologists are noticing a trend of high-skill workers choosing where to live first, and then finding jobs there. Businesses have begun to follow workers to the places they want to live rather than the other way

around. Green spaces and trees can provide a powerful draw for workers seeking quality of life.

## Reducing Red

Trees provide even more value in avoiding expenses through the public utility work they provide. Atlanta has witnessed this trend in reverse. The 16-county metro Atlanta area is losing 54 acres of tree canopy while adding 28 acres of impervious surfaces (roads, parking lots, building rooftops, etc) every single day, according to new data from the Natural Resources Spatial Analysis Laboratory (NARSAL) at the University of Georgia. Over the past 10 years, this has resulted in a cumulative loss of 197,000 acres of trees and an increase of 103,000 acres of hard surfaces.

“By cutting trees, Atlanta has added additional costs to their services for water and air quality,” says Dr. Elizabeth Kramer, director of NARSAL. “It is underutilizing its natural capital, and the fallout is huge.”

**Water treatment.** “Forests are the world’s greatest wastewater treatment facility,” says Stewart.

By reducing the amount of water runoff and improving the quality of the water that does run off, trees can save communities money in the construc-



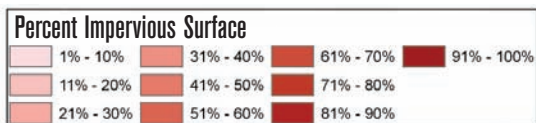
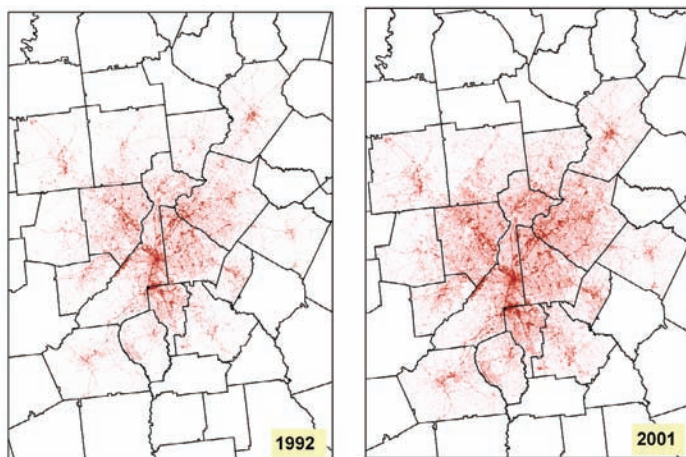
tion of storm water control structures and water treatment facilities. They work their magic by intercepting rainfall through their leaves, branches and roots. In an area of 100% natural vegetation, only 10% of the rainfall ends up as runoff. In an area with only 25% natural vegetation, more than half of that rainfall is runoff, according to Kramer. And that runoff carries oil and other pollutants into the storm water system.

The Center for Urban Forest Research tried to put a price tag on trees' water service. Based on the amount commercial and residential property owners in Charlotte, N.C., pay for storm water fees and the amount of runoff a large tree intercepts, the Center estimated a tree saves Charlotte property owners \$20 per year.

"Typically in a city with a decent tree program, they may spend \$20 per year per tree on their entire tree maintenance program," says McPherson. "So that one benefit alone offsets the entire cost of tree maintenance for the city."

Trees also clean the water that does find its way to water treatment facilities. New York City figured this out about 150 years ago. That's when city officials began purchasing vast tracts of land from three watersheds, the Croton, Catskill and Delaware. By protecting the source water, the city saved itself billions of dollars in water treatment costs, according to a World Bank study.

## From Trees to Asphalt



The metro Atlanta area is becoming decidedly less green. These two satellite images show the dramatic increase in impervious surfaces (roads, parking lots and building rooftops) over the past 10 years.

*Natural Resources Spatial Analysis Laboratory, University of Georgia.*

**Air quality.** Trees have been called the lungs of our cities for good reason. Trees reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere both by absorbing and storing carbon as they grow and by reducing the amount of energy needed for air conditioning, thus reducing the amount of carbon dioxide produced by power plants. One study in Chicago showed that trees in the city annually sequestered the equivalent amount of carbon emitted from all forms of transportation in one week.

Trees also remove other pollutants from the air, including ozone and particulates. Not only do they filter pollutants through their leaves, they also improve air quality by a cooling effect resulting from the evaporation of moisture from their leaves. Similarly, they reduce surface temperatures by providing shade.

A study at Berkeley's National Laboratory showed that if Atlanta lowers its air temperature by 2 to 4 degrees, the city would bring down its ozone levels by 10% to 14%. That's significant because federal highway funds can be withheld if the city fails to meet federal air quality standards.

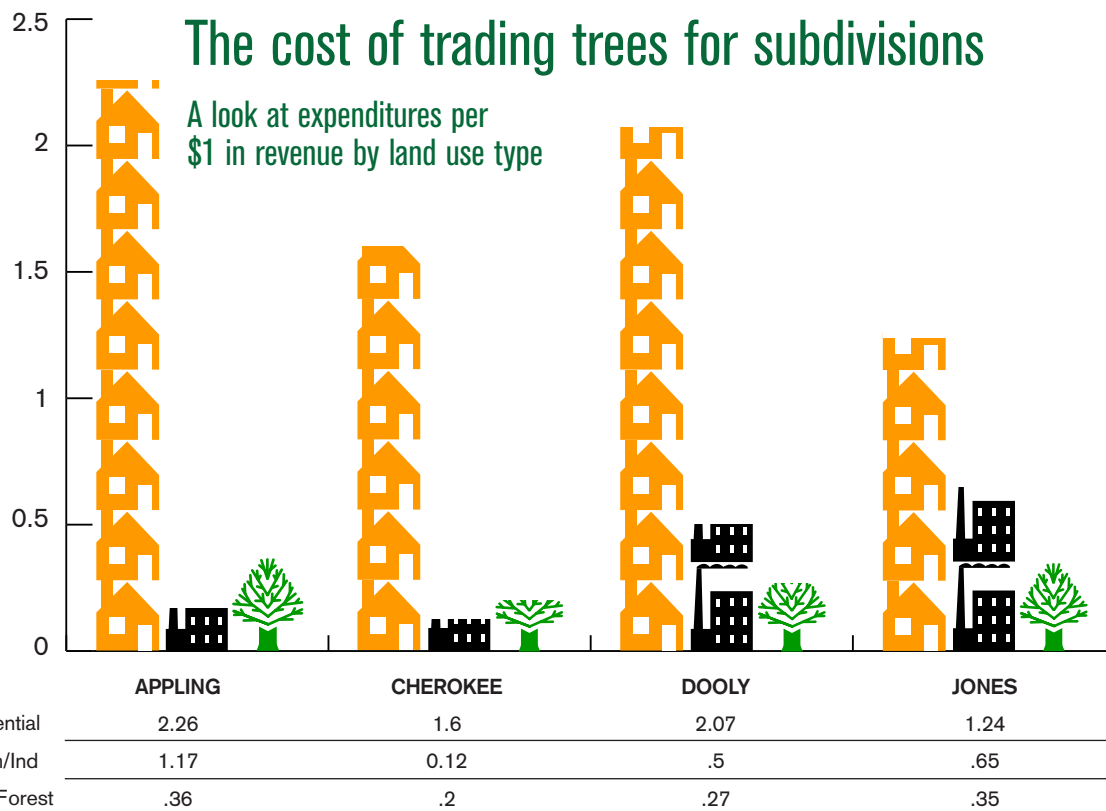
**Health benefits.** By reducing air pollution, trees do more than save money in pollution mitigation efforts — they save money in health care costs. The American Lung Association estimates that ozone-associated health care costs Americans about \$50 billion annually. Much of that expense can be traced to asthma, which is the leading cause of chronic illness in Georgia. Trees can also pull us off our couches into the outdoors, tempting us to become a bit more active. This lure could prove a huge benefit, considering health care costs associated with obesity top \$100 billion a year. (For more on the health benefits of trees, see "The Restorative Power of Parks," page 12.)

**Other savings.** In the hot South, trees help conserve energy by providing shade. In fact, it is possible that trees could reduce summer energy consumption by up to 20 percent. In Dade County, Florida, over half of the residential energy consumed is for air conditioning. Trees currently provide direct energy savings of 3.3%. By adding one mature tree in the right location at each home would give an additional 6.4% energy savings, according to American Forests.

Shade also saves on repaving costs. The Center for Urban Forest Research found that streets with little or no shade needed to be repaved about twice as often as those with 30% to 40% shade.

Given the enormous potential in cost savings, we can no longer afford to ignore the value trees provide. "We all must come to realize there are a lot of green in our trees," says Stewart. "And I'm not talking about leaves."





## The Fallacy of Felling Trees

Local governments have long considered development the prescription for good financial health. Convert farmlands and forestlands to residential subdivisions and the increased property tax base will cure any economic ills.

Not so, says Dr. Jeffrey Dorfman, co-director of the Land Use Studies Initiative at the University of Georgia. “Yes, if you put houses on a piece of land instead of trees, you will get new revenues,” says Dorfman. “But you will also have new expenditures. You will need roads, schools, libraries, trash collection, water and sewer services. It turns out, it’s going to cost you more than you bring in.”

To reach this conclusion, Dorfman looked at four counties in Georgia. In each county, he reorganized the budget so that he could categorize where every penny in revenue came from and where every penny in expenditures went

according to one of three types of land use: residential, commercial/industrial and farm/forest/open lands. For example, the costs of a parks and recreation program would be considered to benefit residential development. The costs of roads would be spread across all types of development. And the local expenditures on the farm services agency would be counted as benefiting farm and forestland.

Dorfman was then able to compare the ratio of expenditures to revenues for the different types of land use. His findings will surprise many.

In not one single instance did residential development generate sufficient revenue to cover its associated expenditures. In Jones County, east of Macon, for example, for every \$1 the county received in revenue, it spent \$1.24 in services for residential areas. By contrast, the

county spent 65 cents in services for the same \$1 in revenue from commercial/industrial land, and it parted with only 35 cents in services for farm/forest land. In Appling County in Southeast Georgia, for every \$1 in revenue the county received, it had to spend \$2.26 in residential areas, compared to 17 cents for commercial/industrial land and 36 cents for farm/forest land.

“Across the board, businesses pay more than \$1 for every \$1 they get back in services,” says Dorfman. “Farm and forest land pays more than \$1 for every \$1 they get back in services. But residential land costs more in services than it pays in revenues. So when a county cuts down trees or converts farmland to build a subdivision, it is actually poorer. As a result, they often end up raising the tax rate to make up the shortfall.”



Shoppers stroll the tree-lined business district in Dalton.



# Investments in Trees Build **BUSINESS**

**W**hen Kellie McBee was looking for a new location for her gift shop, The Pickety Place, downtown Dalton might have seemed the least likely of her choices. It was 2001, and the carpet capitol's downtown district was run-down, largely vacant and unsightly.

But McBee knew changes were afoot. City planners were embarking on a renovation of the downtown business district, which was to include a tree-lined streetscape. McBee took the plunge. She purchased a building on downtown's main thoroughfare and hung out her shingle.

"It was pretty rough at first," says McBee. "When I first came downtown, I could have fired a shotgun and not hit anyone. It was deserted down here."

Today, McBee's business is thriving. The Pickety Place sees a lot more customers come through its doors than it used to when it was tucked in an old house near Dalton College. Sales are brisk. And the property value of McBee's building has quadrupled since she purchased it.

McBee credits the downtown restoration and streetscape for the success. "In my store, I sell things people basically don't need," says McBee. "What I'm really selling is ambience. That's what the trees provide for this area. They give the area its ambience and help draw people here. Because of all the trees and landscaping, this area is now a pleasant place to stroll around, sit and visit and, of course, shop."

McBee has discovered what business owners across the state — and the country — are realizing more and more. Trees are good for business. Trees

boost property values, as McBee can attest. A Weyerhaeuser survey found that 86% of real estate appraisers believe trees and landscaping add dollar value to commercial real estate, and 92% said it enhances sales appeal.

Trees save business owners money in cooling costs. In a downtown area, buildings and paving create a heat island effect. A mature tree canopy reduces air temperature from 5 to 10 degrees. Direct shade from trees can also reduce a business' air conditioning bill.

Trees boost occupancy rates. One study which looked at 30 variables found that landscape amenities have the highest correlation with occupancy rates — higher even than direct access to arterial routes. Greater occupancy draws more customers, which boosts sales.

Some other arboreal benefits are less intuitive, but no less lucrative. Trees draw shoppers and visitors to an area, and even encourage them to stay longer and spend more money. They boost employee productivity. And trees have been shown to reduce crime and vandalism.

So a business looking to boost the black on its bottom line would be wise to invest in some green.

**Trees and shopping sprees** What if someone told you that shoppers would come to your store more frequently, stay longer and actually pay more for your products if your business was framed by a nice tree canopy? Wouldn't you rush out to your nearest nursery and grab some oaks and maples?

That kind of shopping spree would serve retailers well, according to Dr. Kathy Wolf, a research

social scientist at the College of Forest Resources at the University of Washington. In her research program, Wolf conducted studies in three settings: neighborhood business districts in large cities, central business districts in a medium-sized city (Athens, Ga.) and main streets in small cities. She was trying to find out how visitors and shoppers respond to business districts with and without trees. Her findings were remarkably consistent across the three different types of settings.

Some of her results seem self-evident. People reported that they prefer areas with trees. The more trees, the more they like it. They reported that they would come to a tree-lined district more often and stay longer.

Other results were more surprising. She found people were making judgments about the business districts and the individual businesses located there above and beyond the presence of trees. “We showed people pictures of business districts with three different levels of vegetation, but otherwise very similar,” says Wolf. “They said they believed the merchants in a heavily treed district would be more knowledgeable and helpful than those in the area with no trees. They judged the quality of products to be higher in the stores that were surrounded by trees, and they even said they would be willing to pay more for the products in those stores.”

What is going on here? In social psychology, it is called the attribution theory. It holds that since we cannot possibly assimilate all the information with which we are bombarded, we make judgements based on preconceived ideas to simplify things. Then we test those preconceived ideas to see if they are correct or not.

“What is happening here is that people are attributing certain characteristics to merchants and their products simply because they have trees,” says Wolf. “People claim they are willing to spend 9% more on products in small towns and 12% more in large cities for identical products in places that have trees versus those that don’t. If that

“In my store ... I’m really selling ambience. That’s what the trees provide for this area. They give the area its ambience and help draw people here. Because of all the trees and landscaping, this area is now a pleasant place to stroll around, sit and visit and, of course, shop.”

— Kellie McBee, owner,  
The Pickety Place



doesn’t get a merchant’s attention, I don’t know what will.”

**Plants and productivity** In today’s service economy, the most important assets of many companies are its workers. That’s why so many firms are investing in work/life benefits, such as on-site day care, flex time and referral services. A perk that is often overlooked is plants.

Studies have shown that contact with trees and nature has a restorative effect on workers. They are better able to concentrate and report feeling more energized and less stressed if they have the opportunity to interact with nature during their work day.

Scientists believe trees give us a bit of a mental break. After concentrating on work-related tasks for a long period of time, people become cognitively fatigued. Natural settings activate a different part of our brain, drawing on what is called involuntary attention — noticing things instinctively and naturally without having to think about it. When our involuntary attention is activated, our voluntary attention gets a chance to rest. Then we can come back to our task refreshed and better able to concentrate.

“There are a number of studies now that demonstrate quite conclusively having contact with nature improves your ability to focus and stay focused,” says William Sullivan, associate professor and director of the Environmental Council at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “If you think about our capacity to pay attention, it’s an enormously important ability. It’s what helps us achieve our goals and what allows us to learn. It turns out green spaces help support that ability in a very substantial way.”

Employers don’t necessarily have to give their employees breaks to go walk among the trees (although it would be nice). Just a view from a window can have restorative effects. University of Michigan psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan surveyed workers about their rate of illness and level of job satisfaction. They found that workers





Tim Jones, owner,  
G&S Office Supply

without a view of nature from their desks reported 23% more instances of illnesses. They also reported higher levels of frustration and irritability. Those with a view of nature reported better overall health, greater enthusiasm for their jobs, less frustration and feelings of higher life satisfaction.

**Canopy against crime** Trees offer businesses a type of natural security system. Studies by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found significantly less crime in neighborhoods that were greener. The housing units themselves were nearly identical — they were all within one large public housing neighborhood in Chicago. But the areas of the development that had trees and shrubs reported fewer property and violent crimes than their more barren counterparts. And the more dense the tree canopy, the fewer the crimes.

“When you have greener, more pleasant outdoor spaces, people tend to come outside more,” says Sullivan. “When people are outside together, they start to get to know each other. They form friendships. We believe these stronger social bonds help people recognize strangers — people who don’t belong there. There are more eyes on the street so there are fewer opportunities for crimes to occur.”

“We are not saying that if you plant trees there will be no more crime,” continues Sullivan. “We are saying there will be fewer crimes. If you have a pleasant central business district, you’re going to have people hanging out, eating lunch, walking around. I would certainly expect to see less vandalism and theft in that type of environment than I would in a barren setting.”

Tim Jones can vouch for that. The owner of G&S Office Supply in downtown Dalton, Jones has seen the difference a streetscape can make. “We never had a really big problem with crime here, but there have been instances of vandalism on our cars, broken windows and forced entry on our stores,” says Jones. “But since the revitalization project, we haven’t had any problems that I can think of. It seems safer and more secure down here these days. More businesses have moved downtown — our vacancy rate is only about 4% — so there are just more people here keeping an eye on things.”

And more people working. And more people shopping. And more people dining. All this activity comes back to the streetscape and the trees, says McBee of Pickety Place. “The trees are hugely important here,” she says. “They give you a visual break from the pavement, but they also give you an emotional break. The trees are what give this area its down-home, welcoming atmosphere, and that’s what brings people here, and into my business.”

# The Restorative Power of PARKS

Though we seem to do our best to deny it, human beings are creatures of nature. Throughout most of our evolutionary history, the forests and fields were our homes. Indeed, there is a growing body of scientific research that suggests humans' emotional, and even spiritual, connection to nature is actually hard-wired into us. Scientists call it "biophilia."

Even as recognition grows of our innate affinity for the natural world, we are moving further from it. Today, 80% of the U.S. population lives in urban or suburban areas. The closest many of us get to nature on a daily basis may be the occasional tree we drive by on the way to work.

That's why parks are increasingly important. They are our link to nature. They improve our physical health, soothe our psyche, help rear our children and knit together our communities.

"Parks do so much more for us than provide pretty spaces," says Peter Harnik, director of the Center for City Park Excellence at the Trust for Public Land. "They nourish us much more deeply and substantially."

## Healthy minds

**"I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order."**

— John Burroughs

Anyone who has hiked through a forest or relaxed by a stream can attest to the restorative power of nature. Nature soothes us, calms us and lifts us up. "Parks allow people to get away from the chaos of the city and experience feelings of tranquility and peace that they may not be getting anywhere else," says Karen Mumford, research assistant professor in the department of environmental and occupational health at Emory University.

Parks work their restorative magic by activating on our involuntary attention — the kind we don't have to think about. That gives our voluntary attention — the kind we do have to think about — a chance to rest.

The emotional or spiritual solace we get from green spaces is tied back to our evolutionary roots — the biophilia theory. This response has also been documented in studies. For example, a Texas A&M researcher, Robert Ulrich, found that people who view nature after experiencing stressful situations showed reduced physiological stress response, such as blood pressure and pulse rate. They also reported decreased feelings of fear, anger and aggression. Ulrich also found that hospitalized patients who had a view of nature and greenery from their windows recovered more quickly than those who did not.

## Healthy bodies

**"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul alike."** — John Muir

Parks are a community's open-air gyms. With their natural draw on our psyche, they lure us outdoors. Once there, we are more inclined to walk, jog and play. And if there is anything most of us need to do more of, it's walking, jogging and playing.

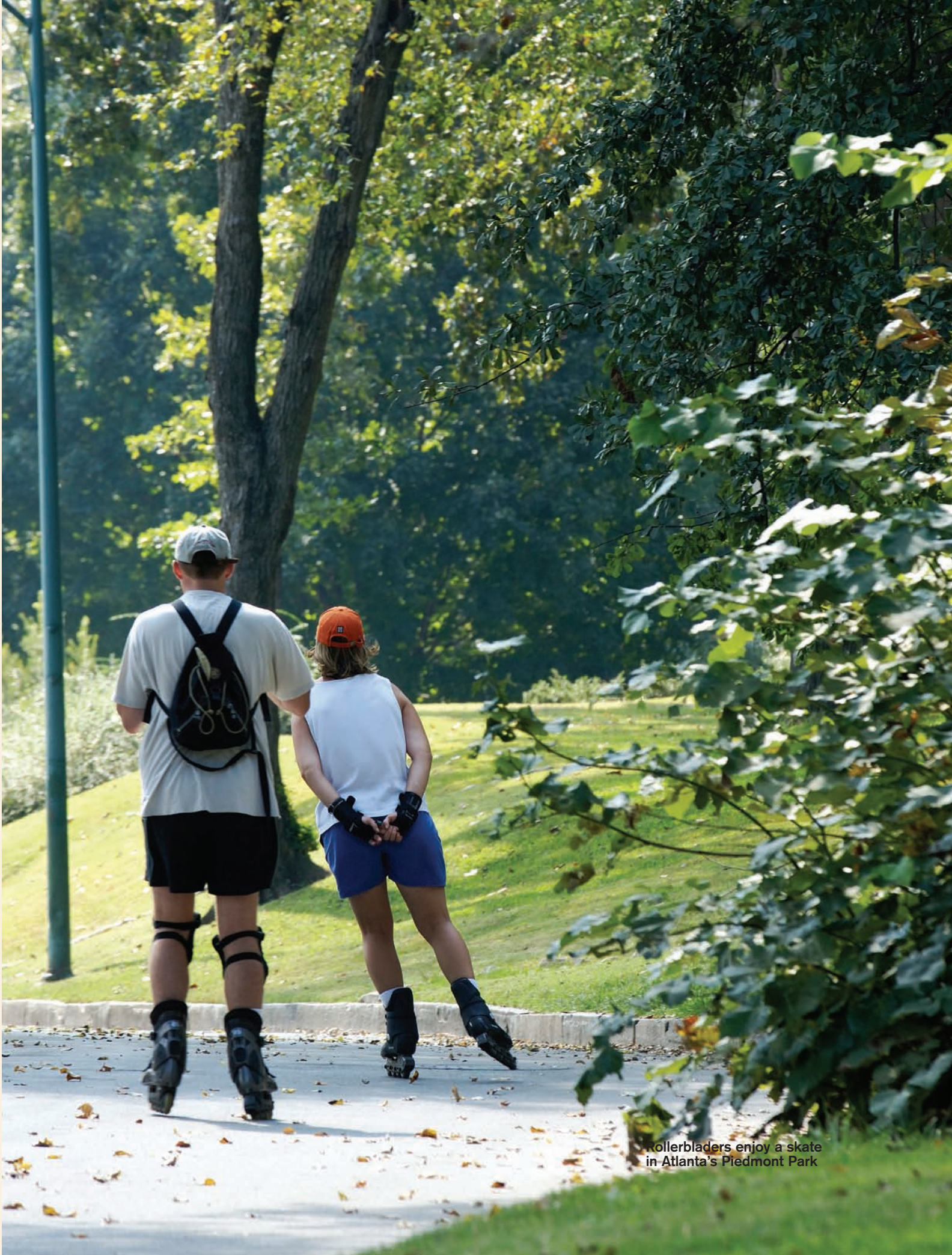
Our state and our country are plagued by an epidemic of obesity, an epidemic that is fed by inactivity. "About 60% of adults in the U.S. are not regularly active, and 25% are just plain inactive," says Mumford.

These sedentary lifestyles have been linked not only to obesity, but also to the risk of developing diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer and depression.

How can a park help cure these ills? A study by the Centers for Disease Control showed the creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25% increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days a week.

Mumford and her colleagues, in a widespread collaboration between local universities and parks departments, have been studying 12 parks in DeKalb County in an





Rollerbladers enjoy a skate in Atlanta's Piedmont Park



effort to add to those findings. “We began this study in 2003, and we are finding that parks might be a very important public health asset,” says Mumford. “They encourage physical activity for people of all ages, from seniors to tots.”

Trees benefit our bodies in other ways, as well. The lungs of our cities promote good health for our own lungs. By absorbing pollutants from the air and lowering ambient temperatures, they allow us all to breathe a little easier. That’s especially good news for the 8.6 million children who suffer from asthma.

Studies have also shown that contact with nature can lower blood pressure and cholesterol, speed recovery from surgery and lower self-reported stress.



Coming together to build a playground and restore John Howell Park in Atlanta’s Virginia-Highland unified the neighborhood.

“The benefits parks offer to our physical health are well-documented,” says George Dusenbury, executive director of Park Pride, a non-profit organization in Atlanta. “One study in Japan showed people who lived near parks actually lived longer than those who didn’t. An investment in parks is also an investment in public health.”

## Healthy children

**“You will find something more in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters.” — St. Bernard**

For small children, playing is learning. Play helps children develop muscle strength and coordination, cognitive thinking, language and reasoning capabilities.

But today, many children have no place to play. At least, no place that has any connection with nature. For all children, but for inner-city children in particular, parks

provide a safe, inviting environment in which to play and explore. That opportunity is vital. Consider these findings from various studies:

- Children who have contact with nature score higher on tests of concentration and self-discipline.
- Children who play regularly in natural environments show more advanced motor skills, including coordination, balance and agility.
- When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills.
- Nature buffers the impact of life’s stresses on children and helps them deal with adversity.

## Healthy communities

**“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.” — William Shakespeare**

A park can transform a cluster of houses into a neighborhood. “Successful parks help form a community,” says Harnik. “Whether it’s mothers with playground-age children, seniors playing chess, couples attending outdoor concerts or teens playing ball, people come together in parks. That’s why so many neighborhoods are named after their parks. They become the face of the community.”

That is certainly what happened in Atlanta’s Virginia-Highland neighborhood. Several homes in the area were razed for a proposed freeway. When the road project fell through, the land was given to the city as a park. However, the park languished, becoming a barren field used for an occasional volleyball game but little else.

Then two and a half years ago, a tree fell on a car during a storm, killing a mother and her two young sons. United by a desire to create some sort of memorial for their lost friends, 400 volunteers converged on the park on a bright day in November and built an elaborate playground.

“Everyone was out working together,” says Cynthia Gentry, who chaired the Kunard Memorial Playground Committee. There was a palpable sense of community.”

That sense still lives today. “No one was ever in that park before,” says Gentry. “Now it is constantly filled. People have picnics there. We have movie nights and summerfests there. People do Tai Chi, walk their dogs, toss the Frisbee. It now feels much more like an old fashioned neighborhood where everyone knows everyone else.”

Which is exactly why towns and neighborhoods need parks. “Parks do so much for us in so many different ways,” says Dusenbury. “They are as necessary to a successful community as roads and utilities. They keep us healthy, happy and connected.”





Arthur Letchas



Raymond "Ray" Elrod



Anthony Emanuel



Jamie Boss

# The Green Road TO PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Northwest Georgia Trade and Convention Center in Dalton was a fitting stage for the Georgia Urban Forest Council's 15th annual conference and awards luncheon, held Oct. 19 and 20, 2005.

As part of the proceedings, a panel of four mayors came together to discuss the challenges and successes in their efforts to incorporate trees as part of their cities' infrastructure. Here is a roundup of what they had to say:

## Arthur Letchas, Mayor of Alpharetta, GA

By the early '90s, Alpharetta city officials realized development of their small city was inevitable as Atlanta continued to stretch its northern boundaries. "Early on,

we established standards to ensure that development could be a long-term success story," says Arthur Letchas, who has served as mayor of Alpharetta since 2002 and has been a resident since 1950.

Part of those standards included one of the strongest tree ordinances in the state — so strong it was upheld in court in a suit against the city. A developer, blocked from taking down specimen trees on his property by the ordinance, sued the city. The court ruled in favor of the ordinance.

The city has also focused its resources on developing traditional parks and a passive park system called the Greenway, a six-mile path along a creek.

The result: Though development has engulfed

“Our trees have been a huge economic enhancement to the community. We have seen downtown go from being virtually dead to having a 4% vacancy rate. Trees are a big part of our downtown.” — **Jamie Doss, Mayor Pro Tem of Rome**

Alpharetta, as city planners foresaw over a decade ago, the city has been able to maintain much of the atmosphere it had before.

“We have been able to balance the needs of development with the needs of the urban forest,” says Letchas. “Our trees and green spaces mean homes are sold before being completed and business condos are leased to capacity. Leasing equates to money earned, and the cycle circles around. It’s a win-win situation for all involved.”

### **Jamie Doss, Mayor Pro Tem of Rome**

A photo hanging in the Rome History Museum captures downtown Rome in 1890. “It looks a little like the moon,” says Jamie Doss, mayor pro tem of Rome. “It’s barren and depressing. There is not one single tree in that photo.”

The north Georgia community has come a long way since that time. In the mid-’70s the town created a tree board. Its tree program began in earnest a decade later with the Broad Street streetscape project. Today, the city of Rome boasts five certified arborists on its payroll, and its historic downtown is shaded by a canopy of healthy trees.

“Our trees have been a huge economic enhancement to the community,” says Doss. “We have seen downtown go from being virtually dead to having a 4% vacancy rate. And if your downtown is strong, anything can happen. Trees are a big part of our downtown.”

### **Anthony Emanuel, Mayor of Trenton**

Trenton is as far northwest as you can get and still be in Georgia. Nestled between Lookout Mountain and Sand Mountain, the community was so isolated that until 1936, you couldn’t get to Atlanta without going through Alabama and Tennessee. Though the bedroom community of Chattanooga today still has less than 3,000 people, it now also includes two interstates, one railroad “... and so much growth we wish we were isolated again,” says Anthony Emanuel, mayor of Trenton.

How can such a small town do anything about trees, Emanuel asks his audience rhetorically. Dedication. “It doesn’t happen because I am mayor,” he says. “It doesn’t happen because of whoever happens to be on the county or city commission. It happens because you have a group

of citizens who are dedicated to protecting the environment of their town.”

Emanuel acknowledges that it has been, and continues to be, a slow process. Trenton has developed a city park. It is building a trail beside a creek that runs through the city. And it has an active tree planting program.

“We don’t have the financial resources to change things overnight,” says Emanuel. “But we have a master plan and we are steadily working toward it. The city of Trenton that you visit 10 years from now will be very different from the city you visit today.”

### **Raymond “Ray” Elrod, Mayor of Dalton**

Ray Elrod is quick to deflect the credit for Dalton’s successful tree and streetscape project. Elrod, who has served as Dalton’s mayor since 2000, cites Harlan Godfrey, former city councilman, Paul Buchanan, the city’s tree chairman since 1991, Kris Thomas, head of the Dalton Tree Board and James C. “Butch” Sanders Jr., Dalton’s city administrator, just to name a few.

Indeed, it takes a village to remake a town. Godfrey and Sanders began working together in the early 1990s to develop a tree ordinance, establish a tree board and get buy-in from the residential and business community. “We had to be very careful how we presented things to people,” says Sanders. “We were dealing with people who didn’t even want to pave their parking lots.”

But as Sanders, Godfrey and other supporters began explaining the economic as well as aesthetic value of trees, they counted more and more converts. Of course, there were some setbacks. At one point, the city cut down all the pin oaks that had crowned the downtown district. The trees had grown too large and created too much of a mess.

“We took them down so we could plant more appropriate trees for the area,” says Sanders. “It caused quite a stir, but now people can see the wisdom behind the decision.”

Today, much of Dalton’s downtown district is lined with young trees and attractive landscaping. The greenery has lured businesses and investment back to the area and encouraged the renovation of historic storefronts.

“Dalton is a work in progress,” admits Sanders. “But at least we are in progress.”





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