

# Tall orders



A turn-of-the-century postcard of Brookline's Main Street shows the stately elm trees that once lined the road.

## Group resurrects The Elm Project to bring back trees

By **HATTIE BERNSTEIN**  
Staff Writer

**S**ix months before her death in 2007 at the age of 94, Helen Fenske started "The Elm Project," an effort to bring back the stately elm trees that once lined either side of Main and Milford streets in Brookline.

The project sputtered and stalled after Fenske died. But now, the local Boy Scouts and the Board of Selectmen have got it moving again.

"This is a long-term investment and it's recession-proof," said Selectman Tad Putney, a Milford Street resident who several years ago purchased an elm and planted it in his front yard, near the street.

The project uses a pay-it-forward model: The Boy Scouts tend about two dozen saplings potted and placed in the woods near the town's safety complex, selling some of the trees when they

reach about five feet and using the proceeds to buy more saplings.

The elms sold to residents are purchased from the Elm Research Institute in Keene, a business that raises elms resistant to Dutch Elm disease.

In turn, buyers plant them in their yards, including property along the town's Main Street, inviting others to do the same.

Putney said Fenske, a neighbor on Milford Street, came up with the idea after volunteering to help the minister of the Brookline Community Church put together a program called "The Treasures of Brookline."

After finding an old photograph of the Main Street lined with towering elms, Fenske was on a mission to bring them back.

"About a dozen eight-foot elm trees were purchased by residents," Putney said, adding that he and his neighbors paid \$300 for each of the trees, which

measured about 12 feet high.

The proceeds served as seed money, literally.

The town used the funds from the tree sales to purchase more than 20 saplings, which they placed in buckets and secured in the ground near the Brookline Safety Complex.

At one point, Putney said, the Board of Selectmen suggested that the Boy Scouts sell the potted trees and use the funds for their activities. But the Boy Scouts had another idea: use the proceeds from the sales of the smaller trees to purchase bigger elm trees and plant the trees along Main and Milford streets.

In the fall of 2006, the town bought two 20-foot elms they planted in the town ball field and dedicated to longtime state lawmaker and community volunteer Betty Hall and former town moderator, the late Tom Arnold.

# Elms being sold are about 5 feet high and cost \$75

From Page 1

Next, Putney said, officials want to plant a large elm on the lawn in front of Town Hall, in memory of Fenske.

And they already have a place marked.

"There was a maple in the front of Town Hall that died," Putney said. "Maples don't do well near a road with salt, but elms are not affected by it."

The Rev. David Smith, pastor of the community church when Fenske began The Elm Project, said he planted two elms in the parsonage on Milford Street two years ago, and both have grown to more than 12 feet.

"It helps bring back the past. At one time, New England had umpteen elms," Smith observed, adding, "People don't realize how much they miss a tree until it's not there anymore."

Dutch Elm disease was discovered in the Ohio River Valley in 1932 and became known as "cancer" in the tree world. Early on, the fungus spread from tree to tree by windblown beetles, destroying more than 100 mil-

lion elms, including those lining New England streets. The disease is caused by a fungus that affects the tree's water conducting system. It clogs vascular tissue and the tree wilts and dies.

Long-term efforts to create a disease-resistant Elm have proven successful, allowing the legendary tree to begin regaining its rightful place in communities.

Lynn Giblin, a volunteer with Brookline Boy Scout Troop 260, said Fenske invited the scouts to join the project.

"Helen asked them to care for the trees," she said. "They helped mulch the trees and they watered them all summer, from May to September."

Giblin said quite a few Scouts from the 35-member troop signed up to take shifts on the watering patrol: each Scout would commit to a week, agreeing to water the plants whenever there was less than an inch of rainfall.

The Scouts also pruned, fertilized, and mulched the potted trees.

"The trees would get big, and we'd sell them every fall," Giblin said. "We'd sell a few trees to

buy bigger trees to plant along Main Street, next year, sell more and purchase smaller trees to backfill the nursery."

This year, the Scouts have already sold three of the five trees earmarked for market. The trees are about 5 feet high and were priced at \$75 each. To make a purchase call Putney at 672-4229.

Meanwhile, Helen's widower, Art Fenske, is watching with pride.

"She knew, for a dream to become a reality, there had to be a how," Fenske said. "The how is the interest of the folks that are involved."

Hattie Bernstein can be reached at 673-3100, ext. 24, or [hbernstein@cabinet.com](mailto:hbernstein@cabinet.com).

## Facing Divorce?

Get solid legal advice at affordable prices:

- Collaborative Law
- Unbundled Services
- Mediation



HONEY HASTINGS  
COUNSELOR AT LAW

Wilton • phone 654-5000  
[www.nhdivorce.com](http://www.nhdivorce.com)

Get your news  
online at  
[www.cabinet.com](http://www.cabinet.com)



A9ch

IN A TIGHT MARKET  
NOT TI