



RECORD STAFF

Frank Varga, shown with his daughter Jaelyn Varga, is a volunteer with the 10,000 Trees Project. He helped plant 100 trees in a storm drain area near his Pastern Trail home in Waterloo.

## Seeing trees for the forest

When Mark Whaley got sick of looking at a wasteland behind his house, he founded the organization 10,000 Trees, and got planting. His group has now surpassed its goal

By Valerie Hill, Record staff

Gazing from the window of his Waterloo home, Mark Whaley saw yet another piece of trash tumbleweeding across the wasteland behind his house. The flat plane seemed to be a catchment for wrappers and plastic bags, all manner of garbage and he was sick of it.

The self-described “tree hugger” took action, gathering a few like-minded citizens then applying for funding from TD Canada Trust’s Friends of the Environment Fund, using the cash to plant a lovely little forest. Suddenly Whaley was onto something. The question was where to take it from there.

“We thought ‘what’s a lofty goal?’” recalled Whaley, founder of the 10,000 Tree Project, a non-profit charitable organization that recently planted its symbolic 10,000<sup>th</sup> tree in front of Waterloo city centre. In fact, the group has planted several more than their original goal, all native species, creating 40 forests throughout Waterloo in schoolyards and public spaces, on empty lots owned and maintained by the city.

“We thought, ‘let’s plant 10,000 big trees over 10 or 12 years, trees that already had a couple of years in them,’” he said. “It was an opportunity to take what we had learned and now it’s turned into an organization. We have meetings in kitchens, it’s really grassroots.”

Officially formed in 2000, 10,000 Trees is supported by various partnerships including the Grand River Conservation Authority, which supplies the trees, Union Gas which supplies volunteers and cash and funding sources such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation as well as several corporate sponsors. In both the spring and the fall, a core group of volunteers decides which area needs to be planted then determines how many and what types of trees and bushes



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Waterloo Coun. Mark Whaley stands on his trusty tree planting shovel beside one of more than 10,000 trees his non-profit organization has planted.

are most appropriate. When the actual planting takes place, a remarkable thing happens: the whole community participates.

“We’d be out there in the rain or the muck,” said Frank Varga, an organization volunteer and regional manager with Union Gas. “We get 10 or 12 families out to plant and then the neighbourhood shows up as well as our employees.”

Varga explained his company admits that natural gas is a fossil fuel and therefore contributes to greenhouse gases so funding environmental projects through their Helping Hands in Action program helps create

balance. “We provide some mitigation.”

“We contribute money to buy the trees, and sweat equity,” he said. “It’s very engaging for the employees and retirees. There’s that personal satisfaction when you plant a tree and over the years, you can go back and check on it. It’s about environmental stewardship.”

In 2004, Research In Motion purchased 2,000 trees planted at Laurel Creek Nature Centre. In October of that year, Union Gas supported the purchase and planting of red maples on Veteran’s Green on University Avenue. In 2006, the group again planted at Laurel Creek, this time replacing a stand of

trees destroyed by beetles. That same year, it rescued trees from an area slated for development, replanting each one in a schoolyard. This spring it planted 500 trees at Laurel Creek in celebration of winning the provincial June Callwood Outstanding volunteer achievement award and in May it planted 100 trees in an area known as the Melitzer Woodlot.

The woodlot is an area consisting of a large storm water management pond backing onto 11 hectares of conservation lands. It was a gorgeous, lush spot, until beavers moved in and systematically mowed down the forest. The city trapped and relocated the toothy critters and 10,000 Trees took over replanting the area with 100 trees known to be unpalatable to beavers such as white cedar, silver maple and green ash, as well as numerous bushy plants including ninebark and serviceberry.

Whaley, a Waterloo city councillor and retired social worker, said there are so many dividends for the future resulting from planting trees, everything from creating cooling shade for nearby buildings, to filtering the air of carbon and impurities.

“We take a piece of wasteland that’s expensive for the city to maintain and suddenly, it’s a forest,” he said.

The organization’s website ([www.10000trees.org](http://www.10000trees.org)) includes school curriculum on tree planting as a social action tool, as well as YouTube video of this spring’s planting of the autumn flame maple at Waterloo City Centre.

Though the organization has surpassed its original goal of 10,000 trees, it is really just getting rolling, a testament to the power of a handful of citizens willing to act.

“We’re planting trees and planting ideas,” said Whaley.

[vhill@therecord.com](mailto:vhill@therecord.com)

### RESEARCH FILE

## Study looks at why people buy green products

**Study:** Why do consumers choose or reject green products and how can businesses and governments use policies and incentives to help shape those choices?

A University of Guelph mathematician will study those questions under a new Canada-U.S. Fulbright Visiting Research Chair.

**Researcher:** Prof. Monica Cojocar, U of G’s department of mathematics and statistics.

Cojocar is Guelph’s first current faculty member to visit a U.S. institution under the prestigious award, announced recently. The Fulbright Program involves ex-

ceptional scholars from more than 150 countries.

“It’s one of only two Fulbright research chairs available to Canadian scientists and (Cojocar) is able to take it at a location that will provide an excellent fit for her research,” said Prof. Brian Allen, chair of Guelph’s department of mathematics and statistics.

**Study focus:** Starting next January, Cojocar will spend five months at the University of California, Santa Barbara, studying what motivates consumers to buy green products such as organic food, hybrid vehicles and home products such as geothermal heating, solar heating and high-

efficiency furnaces.

She hopes to help businesses and governments design better policies and incentive programs to reduce harmful emissions and lower the use of non-renewable resources.

Cojocar will apply game theory, market models and computer simulations to model people’s behaviour over time. Her work may help determine how large a subsidy or rebate to offer — and for how long — to urge consumers to adopt green products.

She will look at decisions made by entire populations and by individual consumers, including how social networks compel people to

jump aboard a green trend.

For Cojocar, it’s not just academic.

When she and her husband bought a fuel-efficient hybrid car in 2007, they faced spending an extra \$7,000 over the standard model. But they used federal and provincial rebates worth about \$3,000 to offset that cost — never mind saving about \$400 a year in gas commuting between Waterloo and Guelph.

“Suddenly it becomes manageable,” she said.

Cojocar said companies can design a rebate or subsidy to make green products attractive to “early adopters” — people who typically

lead in buying new products — as well as the majority of followers.

“Rebates take your potential market share from early adopters alone to a suddenly larger consumer population.”

Figuring out the amount and duration of a subsidy involves complicated math, including knowledge of networks and dynamical systems.

Cojocar arrived at U of G in 2003 under a University Faculty Award from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. She studied math in her native Romania and completed her PhD at Queen’s University in 2002.

**Source:** University of Guelph.