

Giants Among Us – Two Wellsboro Elms Make the List of “Champion Trees of Pennsylvania”

Recently, a small group of “tree enthusiasts” got together to document the presence of a true champion in our midst. Braving an impending storm, students from Rock L. Butler Middle School, Osram officials, and interested citizens carefully measured a massive American Elm (*Ulmus americana*) that has quietly resided in a little wooded strip between two small companies. Quiet in its residence, but AWESOME in its presence, the behemoth stands 116 feet tall, is 5’10” in diameter at the trunk, and its crown spreads majestically for 112 feet. Using the nationally recognized scoring system for big trees, this tree scored 365 points, placing it a mere 14 points behind the current big tree state champion in Pittsburgh.

While not quite as big in the points but equally as impressive in its display, the elm that resides in front of the Chamber of Commerce building on Main Street also made it on the list of Pennsylvania’s Big Trees. This tree stands 96 feet tall, measures 4’ 9” in diameter, and frames the commerce building within its 101 foot crown. What’s particularly unique about this elm is its tenacity, having survived for so long right in the midst of our bustling town. The external stress caused by auto exhausts,



Almost too big for pictures, Pete Herres stands before this champion tree that defines the term “Strong Silent Type.” It scored 365 points and is listed as the second largest in Pennsylvania.

road salts, and soil compaction can, over time, seriously inhibit a tree’s growth. But this tree, also known in Wellsboro folklore as the old “hanging elm,” has stood its ground. Due to

its own sheer stubbornness combined with careful monitoring and nurturing by borough arborists, this tree has held its own to become an icon of our town.

In fact, both of these trees can be considered “survivors” in the truest sense. In the 1930s Dutch elms disease was first detected in North America. It spread rapidly from east to west, devastating millions of elms throughout the U.S.; American elms are particularly susceptible. The disease, a fungus, is spread by bark beetles as they burrow into the bark. The fungus then spreads throughout the living tissue, blocking water and nutrient flow, and eventually killing the tree. Happily, thus far these two trees have shown some resistance to infection.

If you would like to see the list of Pennsylvania’s Big Trees and associated National List of Big Trees, you can start by visiting www.pabigtrees.com. Once at this web-site there are links that can take you to the national list, as well as information about measurement procedures.

To go directly to the list containing Wellsboro’s own go to www.pabigtrees.com/trees/species/ulmus_elm.htm.



Members of the Measurement Crew.



This American Elm in front of the Chamber of Commerce building scored 303 points and is listed in fourth place on the “Champion Trees of Pennsylvania” web-site.