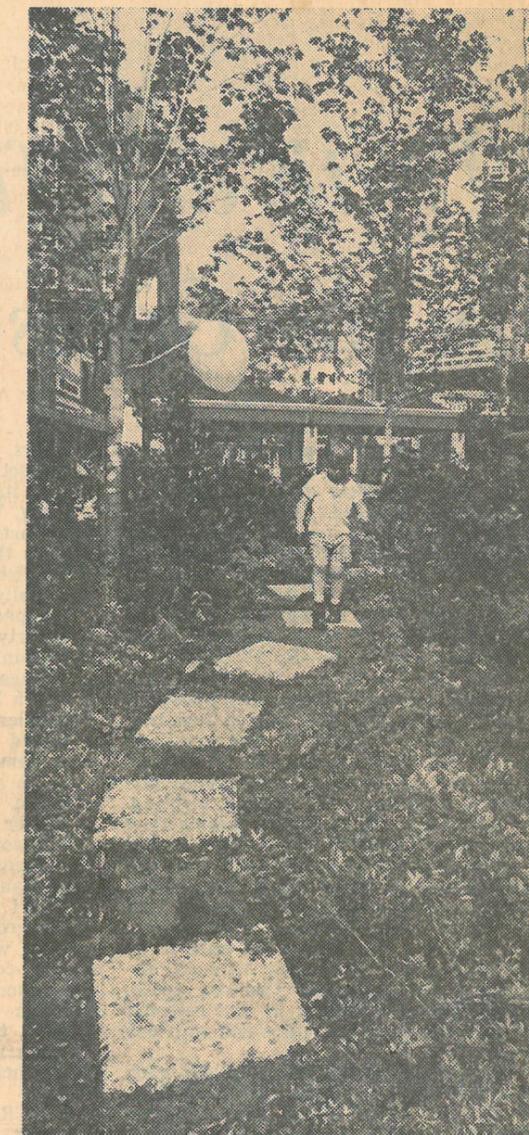
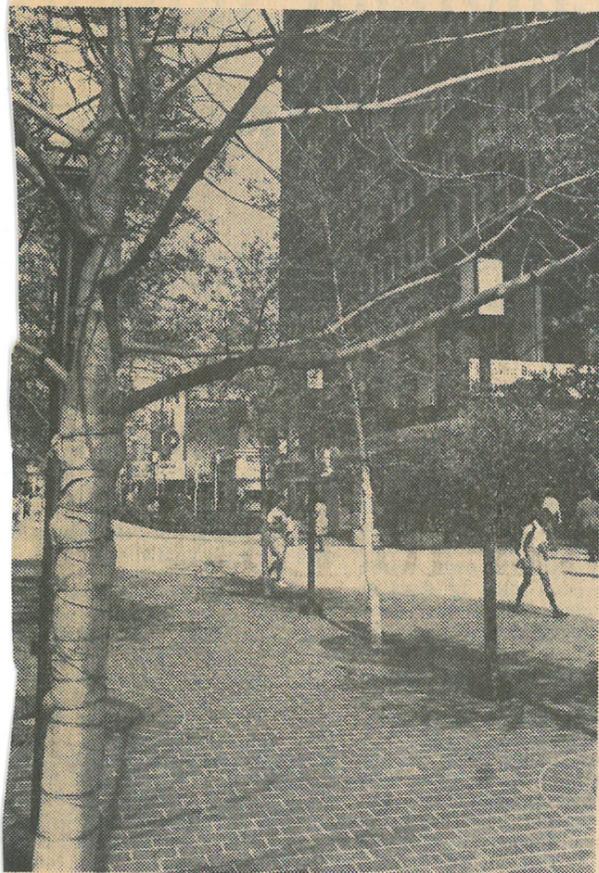


Environment

The re-greening of Louisville



Staff Photos by David Ross Stevens

With its now-abundant shrub and tree life, Louisville's River City Mall on Fourth Street between Broadway and Liberty is attracting more shoppers, including Larry Heck Jr., 3, of Okolona, right. But some trees, such as the one at left, find it difficult to survive and need special treatment.

Downtown, it could mean profits . . .

IN THE NAME of progress, thousands of trees were razed on this floodplain now called the City of Louisville to make way for a new crop of shimmering glass, steel and brick. That was decades ago.

Today, in the name of progress, hundreds of trees are being replanted in downtown Louisville amidst the dominant species of brick-and-mortar. The modest boom in revegetation is ironically accompanying the construction of even more buildings.

A new mall, a new riverfront, new banks, new governmental plazas have all brought a tinge of green that has been missing from the city since the turn of the century. For many years the sycamores, oaks and elms yielded grudgingly to merchants who wanted their

signs noticed more than they wanted a shade-producing bough.

But today the downtown businessman sees trees and flowers as money in the pocket. Not directly, but as something of a drawing card for people, and people eventually spend money.

Landscape architect Carl Johnson of Ann Arbor, Mich., said, "Louisville is coming along beautifully. The city has always been known across the country as a green city. Trees all over the place. But downtown Louisville was as sterile and cold as most big cities, until recently that is."

Most large cities have experienced so much deterioration in the core area

that they don't know where to start. On the other hand, medium to small-size cities are where the action is for landscape architecture. Particularly impressive are the downtowns of Eugene, Ore., Ann Arbor, Mich., and Dubuque, Iowa. That's why the greening of Louisville the past three years has been a bit unusual.

The increase in plantings is being undertaken in the worst of conditions, for the city environment is the most hostile for a tree. For one thing, a forest floor, with its constant enrichment of leaf mulch, is ideal, but a paved environment is totally lacking in the nutrients a tree needs. A 40-foot-tall tree daily

takes in 50 gallons of dissolved nutrients from the soil and pumps it to the top-most leaves. At the same time 60 cubic feet of pure oxygen are released to the air.

Air pollution is an even greater deterrent to urban trees. Soot and poisonous gases clog the breathing pores in leaves. Needled evergreens are virtually impossible downtown because of automobile pollution.

In some areas, people are the biggest problem. Plucking leaves, and carving tree trunks lower the survival rate. Recently geranium plants have disappeared from Louisville's River City Mall, a first in the experience of mall planners.

While the trees on the mall have es-

aped thievery, they are on the brink of death also. Many already have been replaced and the out-of-state landscaping firm indicates the subcontractor did not plant high-quality trees in the first place.

Louisville mall architect A. Bailey Ryan said last week that about 40 per cent of the plantings are unacceptable from a quality standpoint. The city is withholding \$32,000 from a subcontractor until the plants and trees are replaced.

Quality or not, trees often lose the battle with nature in downtown areas. Louisville landscape architect Ed Ely said that increased wind, heat scald from the pavement, and large buildings are hindrances as well as the lack of sunlight, moisture and good air.

In Los Angeles the city fathers con-

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ceded to the asphalt and car pollutants by installing plastic trees and shrubs in the center meridian of Jefferson Boulevard.

Ely said, "Probably the biggest aid to revegetating a city area is in analyzing the restrictions imposed by buildings and streets and pollution and people. With this information in hand, the correct plant for the correct place can be chosen. And with proper maintenance, it should grow. I have found that building owners are certain to maintain doors, locks and roofs, but plants? Sometimes they are left to fend for themselves."

William Heffernan, recently retired City of Louisville forester, said that tree

care begins with the planting. A gift of many honey locust trees for Broadway cost the city a lot of money because the concrete sidewalks had to be cut away, "bad" dirt was removed, gravel drainage had to be laid in horizontally and vertically, and good potting soil had to be trucked in.

For several years in the 1940s Heffernan had an ally in then-Mayor Charlie Farnsley, who instigated the planting of about 500 trees per year along city streets. Farnsley called them his air-conditions.

As it turns out, he was ahead of his time. Today's naturalists have measured the tree both as a machine and as an economic asset. A mature tree's cooling effect can be equivalent to 10 room-size air-conditioners.

Translated into a dollar figure, one scientist estimates the shade value at \$4 per square inch of trunk cross section per year. (A one-time cost of a new tree and its installation is placed at \$8 per square inch of cross section.)

Even the aesthetics of a tree has monetary value—another \$2 per square inch of cross section. Mature trees increase the value of a residential property, and they provide a comfortable setting in a commercial area.

One landscaper said that new urban malls with their trees and shrubs have not necessarily recaptured former crowds of shoppers, but the trends of declining customers have been stabilized. Most downtown business organizations wait too long to reverse the deterioration of the city environment.

The shady side of the street during the summer will attract more people. Thus, it is reasoned, that trees on the sunny side will keep customers under the shade-producing leaves. During the winter, leafless trees with distinctive branching or richly patterned bark are attractive.

While pollution often retards tree growth, the tree counteracts by removing pollutants from the air. The leaves physically filter out foul air and exchange a surplus of carbon dioxide for pure oxygen.

This month 36 more trees are being added to downtown Louisville at Federal Square, which is under construction between Sixth and Seventh streets. The government-owned park, also featuring a fountain, a rose garden and shrubbery, is merely the latest addition to an already green-conscious community.