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Flaws riddle ash borer fight

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Grosse Pointe Farms tackles ash tree killer

Work to develop a treatment strategy began in 2001

By Norman Sinclair
The Detroit News

GROSSE POINTE FARMS—After watching Dutch Elm disease ravage hundreds of towering shade trees in this upscale Lake St. Clair community 30 years ago, city officials were determined not to stand by and watch their ash trees suffer the same fate at the hands of the Emerald Ash Borer.

As thousands of ash trees began dying in numerous cities and townships on the west side of Metro Detroit in 2001, Shock Brothers Tree Care, the city's private foresters, were scrambling to find out everything they could about the decline and death of the trees.

Shock Brothers began trunk injections and root soil applications similar to the strategy used for years to combat the Bronze Birch Borer in Michigan.

The plan so far has been working, disproving the state's contention that the best solution is chopping down and grinding up infected ash trees.



“To do nothing about the ash would have been a disservice to our environment,” says Susan M. Shock, who runs Shock Brothers Tree Care, which has taken care of trees in the Farms for 46 years.

Shock Brothers of Warren, who have been in the forestry business for more than 80 years, have been taking care of trees in the Farms for 46

years. They are still treating 400 surviving ash trees.

“To do nothing about the ash would have been a disservice to our environment,” said Susan M. Shock, the third generation family member who now runs the company. “We bypassed anything that might have been iffy and went to the best insecticide available to the industry. We eliminated trying anything else, figuring if this doesn't work we are in trouble.”

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With strong support from current Councilman Joe Leonard, who was at the time head of the city's public service department, the company tagged 600

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older ash trees with trunks of four inches or bigger on city public areas. Numbered brass badges were attached to each tree to keep track of them. The treatments began in 2002.

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Now, in the third year of treatment, nearly 700 ash trees in parks, along roads, and public rights of way boast full healthy canopies.

"I think we have beaten this thing. We have not lost one tree since (the Emerald Ash Borer) has been identified, and that's a pretty good success rate," said Terry Brennan, the city's current director of public works.

"Look at what other communities are spending removing and replacing trees," he said. "Removing and replacing trees cost between \$750

and \$1,000. We would be out some \$600,000 and that's a lot of money. And then the many years you wait before you regain the environmental benefits of these beautiful trees."

Shock Brothers

have been successfully treating 1,600 ash trees on public and private property in the Farms. Susan Shock said 98 percent of the trees treated from 2002 remain healthy.

Among them are 70 towering specimens planted by Edsel and Eleanor Ford in the 1920s on the grand lawn of their 86-acre estate, now a popular museum on Lake Shore Drive.

Don Snodgrass, the estate's director of grounds, said while it is impossible to treat about 1,500 ash trees in the woods that span the property, saving those on the grand lawn, some of which soar over the Tudor mansion, is a priority.

"We keep the integrity of the original landscape by replacing any tree that dies with an identical tree. Losing these ash would be disastrous," he said.

While Shock's hometown of Warren and neighboring Sterling

Heights are following the Department of Agriculture's dictate not to treat ash trees, the Warren Consolidated School District hired Shock to treat 275 ash trees last year on their campuses in both cities.

"Most of them already had infestations and we lost a few, but all the others are doing beautifully," Shock said. "The ones we lost had other serious problems as well that could have killed them."

Earlier this month the ash tree disaster hit Shock close to home.

As she drove home after work to her condominium complex, Aberdeen Pines, the 13 ash trees that lined the driveway were gone.

Three years ago the condo association declined to treat the trees.

"Over the last two years, I watched helplessly as those trees declined and died," she said.

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