A few years ago a truck barreled over the curb near Whatley Bush's home on Bransford Road and ran over a tree. "It uprooted my neighbor's tree completely and slid into my yard to kill a few azaleas. A year later, a second truck, a moving van, came through and took off a huge limb on another tree, so I'm witnessing the vulnerability of the trees," he says.

However, Augusta's forest stands in the path of another danger that's not as clear as speeding trucks, but ever present and just as deadly. Some of the trees in Augusta that make up the larger population of the "urban forest" are starting to die of old age. Consequently, Bush—one of many Augustans who have become concerned about the future of city trees—feels that unless the city adopts a definite plan for maintaining and tracking its trees, much of the city's history and character will be lost. He's particularly concerned about the trees of Forrest Hills, his own neighborhood, which was built in the 1920s.

To see this part of Augusta's forest, drive west down Walton Way and turn left onto Lakeforest Drive. It's a bumpy ride as your car rumbles over brick paving, but soon you will forget the vibrating sensation and be enchanted by the street's beauty. On this old tree-lined street, the tips of outstretched branches kiss in the center of the road high above drivers, walkers, and joggers to form a green canopy. Look up, and even on a bright day, golden rays of sun are merely glimpsed like stars in an emerald heaven. It's cooler than other parts of the city. It's sweeter too.

"Forrest Hills was one of the first subdivisions in Augusta, and when it was formed it was a cow pasture. There was not a tree on it anywhere. I've seen pictures of it from that time, and the person who developed it had the insight to plant trees along the roads. Because of that, it now has a great character," says Bush.

Bush remembers climbing up magnolia trees and out on the limbs of sturdy oaks as a boy growing up in Forrest Hills, but today, he sees what once

Bransford Road, part of the Forrest Hills neighborhood built in the 1920s, is one of the more enchanting streets of Augusta because of its many towering oak trees.

appeared eternal is now passing away.

"As you drive through the neighborhood, you can tell where the trees have died and have been cut away," says Bush, "It takes ten years for trees to get to the size where they can provide a canopy. Not all the trees will die at the same time. But if we don't jump on the situation, then all of a sudden the character of Forrest Hills will disappear. We will still have the brick roads, but we will not have the trees. The character of the neighborhood is first the trees and then the bricks," he explains.

Jim Blount, superintendent of Trees and Parks for the City of Augusta,

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agrees with Bush that trees contribute to a neighborhood's character.

"Take the tree-lined streets of downtown, Old Towne, Forrest Hills and compare to, say, Highland Park which is south of Wrightsboro Road by Daniel Field, and you get an obvious difference in the heat that you feel, in the comfort that you feel, just the pleasantries of the whole thing," says Blount.

The phone rings almost constantly in his office. Can somebody come down and trim a city tree that's blocking a stop sign? Couldn't they do something about a limb that's about to fall and possibly injure someone? At one point, a Public Works employee comes in to report that someone has driven over a young maple tree in front of the Transit Authority.

Blount wonders why people at the turn of the century planted trees while

people after the second World War did not.

"Seems like we went through a time during World War II and during the post war era where there wasn't much interest in the environment, there wasn't much in way of tree planting done."

It's only been recently that Augustans have become interested in tree planting again. Blount cites Dr. Vendie Hooks, a local surgeon, as one person who has been instrumental in building interest in tree planting through the Trees for Life program, a project of the American Cancer Society. Trees for Life was responsible for planting over 100 trees in the last two-and-a-half years. The city itself planted 500 trees in 1993.

Bush and Blount both express an interest in seeing a group start in Augusta dedicated to greening its streets. However, Blount, who prefers the title of City Forester to Superintendent, believes that in addition to tree planting, the best way to keep Augusta green is to teach proper tree care to all who may be responsible for city trees and to create a systematic maintenance plan of preventive care.

For instance, the department has been working with Georgia Power to encourage the use of "natural target pruning" which discourages the haphazard cutting of trees to keep branches away from power lines. Workers are taught how to cut the tree up and around the power line, which gives a more natural look, is better for the tree, and reduces overall maintenance. This type of cutting causes the tree to grow around the power line and creates a pocket that insulates the power line while preventing sun from reaching the branch most likely to grow into the lines.

In addition, Trees and Parks finally convinced the city council to approve a special forest friendly project: the tree inventory. As Blount and his colleagues have had to explain often, "It's more than counting trees."

This past summer, Trees and Parks contracted a company to storm the streets of Augusta with datacorders to count and categorize every city tree. From the

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