

An Earth Day Birthday

Group Planted Swamp Oak, Black Gum Tree

Environmental Group Plants Trees At Purcell

By **KELLY CLARK**

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HARRISONBURG — Fittingly, a city environmental group chose to mark its 10th birthday on Earth Day.

About 25 people attended Climate Action Alliance of the Valley's Earth Day Celebration at Purcell Park on Sunday. The event featured a picnic lunch, lawn games and the planting of two trees beside the park's pond.

Earth Day launched on April 22, 1970, when 20 million people across the country protested in favor of better environmental

conditions. The protests resulted in the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by the end of the year.

In addition to commemorating Earth Day, members of CAAV's

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Rosie Lynch (left), a member of the Climate Action Alliance of the Valley, and Pete Churney plant a black gum tree Sunday during the group's Earth Day celebration at Purcell Park.

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Steering Committee used the celebration — and a birthday cake — to mark the anniversary of the group's founding in 2008.

Mike Hott, an arborist who works for the Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation Department, also led a tree identification tour around the park.

Participants planted a swamp oak to represent “the continuation of perseverance from one generation to the next,” said Cathy Strickler, CAAV co-founder and former steering committee chair. The group also planted a black gum tree next to the pond in honor of Anne Nielsen, a CAAV co-founder and chair of its coalition building committee. Nielsen, 82, taught biology at Blue Ridge Community College for 13 years and helped create the school's arboretum. She said Earth Day is more vital than ever because of the

celebration, Harrisonburg Mayor Deanna Reed said she initially didn't consider environmentalism a high priority but reconsidered “after seeing snow in April and summer weather in February” in the Valley.

“I didn't care if we recycled, or about going green or global warming,” she said. “But now I do care, and I especially care now that I am mayor.” Before helping to plant the black gum, Nielsen asked participants to remain aware of environmental issues and to love their neighbors. “Earth Day means that just once a year, at least, we can get people to stop and pay attention,” she said.

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increased international debate over global warming. “I was teaching about global warming from the very beginning,” she said. “When we started getting so much change in the seasons, I recognized the signs of climate change.” In an address during the



Anne Nielsen, a co-founder of Climate Action Alliance of the Valley, examines a black gum tree planted in her honor Sunday during the group’s Earth Day celebration at Purcell Park.

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