



NEWS

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Montco Plants a “Moon Tree”

Norristown, PA (April 23, 2015) – The Montgomery County Commissioners, along with other county staff and a representative of the Morris Arboretum, today planted a cutting at the county courthouse from one of the original moon trees whose seeds traveled around the moon and back to earth on the Apollo 14 mission of 1971.

The tree, a sycamore, was planted on the northwest corner of the courthouse property near the intersection of Airy and Swede Streets.

In cooperation with the US Forest Service, 500 seeds from five native tree species were taken on the mission by astronaut and command module pilot Stuart Roosa. The moon seeds proved to be hardy travelers. They germinated well and grew with the same vigor as their earthbound counterparts. Then, in honor of America’s Bicentennial, Moon Trees were planted in 1976 at the White House, in many areas of the United States, and in several other countries. In our area, moon sycamores were planted in Washington Square, Philadelphia, Core Creek Park in Bucks County, and at the Lockheed Martin campus in King of Prussia.

In 2011, the ailing Moon Tree in Washington Square in Philadelphia was replaced by a second generation seedling grown by Morris Arboretum from cuttings taken from the original tree.

“The Moon Tree we proudly plant here today is a sister of that second generation Washington Square specimen, and is a gift from Morris Arboretum to the people of Montgomery County,” said Commissioner Bruce Castor, who was in office when the tree was originally designated for Montgomery County in 2011. Morris Arboretum has been caring for the tree until it was strong enough to be planted on the courthouse property.

Anyone wanting more information on the Moon Tree program can go to this website:

http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/lunar/moon_tree.html.

Here are some additional related facts compiled by Beth Pilling of the Montgomery County Planning Commission:

- Morris Arboretum is a valued partner that for many years has helped our county stay green and shaded. The historic public garden began as a country estate established in 1887 and donated as a public garden in 1932. Currently the official arboretum of the Commonwealth of PA, the arboretum promotes the relationship between people, plants, and places. Its location spanning the Montgomery County/Philadelphia border makes it a convenient resource for Eastern Montgomery County as well as the greater Philadelphia region.
- Montgomery County has a long history of reaching for the stars. In the 18th century, the county's earliest astronomer, David Rittenhouse, whose monument is located just steps away below the courthouse plaza, was world renowned for his studies of the planets, as well as his telescopes, scientific inventions, and public contributions. Ironically, it was Rittenhouse who commented on the absurdity of thinking that mankind could travel to the moon.
- The 19th century saw Norristown's own Thaddeus Lowe make history. Lowe's discovery of usable lighter-than-air gases enabled him to navigate the skies as a balloonist, explorer, and acclaimed "astronaut."
- The 20th century proved that David Rittenhouse's 18th century skepticism was a bit premature as the Lockheed Martin complex in King of Prussia was a major provider of the space systems that did indeed take mankind to the moon.