

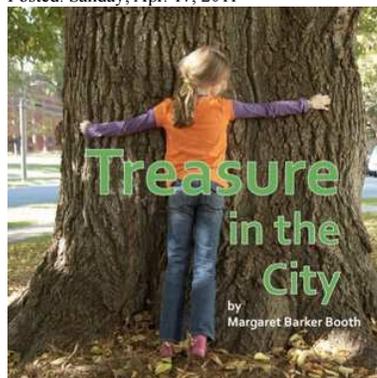
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## Charlotte woman is a real tree-hugger

Maggie Barker will host **Treasure Tree Sunday**, a day to celebrate Charlotte's trees.

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By Michael J. Solender  
Special Correspondent  
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As the cover of "Treasure in the City" implies, Maggie Barker is a true tree-hugger. She will share her love of trees next Sunday at Queens University. Heather Liebler photo -

### More Information

- [city\\_treasuretrees0417\\_GGE2IVSUK.1.xml\\_FACTBOX00](#)

Want to go?:

Treasure Tree Sunday: A Festival of Trees will be held at 2 p.m. next Sunday at Queens University of Charlotte, Sykes Auditorium, John H. Sykes Learning Center, 1900 Selwyn Ave. The event is free. For information, go to [charlottetreasuretrees.shutterfly.com](http://charlottetreasuretrees.shutterfly.com)

Like many Charlotte residents, Maggie Barker loves the magnificent tree canopy that is found throughout most of the city.

Barker's love of trees is so strong and has such an important place in her role as an educator that she recently wrote and released a special guidebook to several unique and significant trees in Mecklenburg County. Her book is titled "Treasure in the City."

The book takes readers on a compact tour around the Queen City to discover 10 of Charlotte's most wonderful and unique trees in our community. Treasure Trees are so designated because of their outstanding size, old age or historical significance. The recognition comes from local arborists who maintain records on more than 100 species that are indigenous to our area.

Together with her husband, Don Booth, an entomologist and "tree doctor," and Charlie Williams, a retired Mecklenburg County librarian, naturalist and botanical storyteller, Barker will host Treasure Tree Sunday: A Festival of Trees, a free discussion and interactive session at Queens University on May 1 is open to the public.

Barker is a prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher at Park Road Montessori School. She is a four-time finalist for CMS Teacher of the Year and has been honored as a founder of A Child's Place. The UNC Charlotte History Department named Barker Woman of the Year during its 1998 International Women's Day observance. She was selected to travel to Cuba as a member of the Teacher-to-Teacher Peace Delegation in 2004.

"My goal is that children will fall in love with trees and see how important they are to the beauty and health of our lives," said Barker. "In fact, trees and children have something in common: They are both full of life and a source of beauty and renewal."

She is so enthusiastic about our local Treasure Trees that she wanted to document their background and provide a resource for others to locate nearby Treasure Trees and enjoy them as much as she does. "I grew up in Ireland," said Barker, who has lived in Charlotte for more than 20 years, "I was raised with a great reverence for nature and trees especially. My grandparents were farmers, yet they would never consider taking a tree in their field - they would simply farm around it."

Barker settled in Brooklyn, N.Y., when she emigrated to the U.S. and her love for trees flourished even more as she came to know and enjoy Prospect Park. The public park was designed by legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted is perhaps best known as the designer of New York City's Central Park, and his influence can be seen in Charlotte's own Myers Park neighborhood.

"I love that park in Brooklyn and was witness to many tree preservation initiatives in New York, including their recent MillionTreesNYC initiative. This is a public/private effort under way to plant and maintain one million trees in all five boroughs of the city over the next decade," said Barker. "I thought about what I could do to draw attention to the wonderful trees we have here in Charlotte to help create awareness about the beauty and benefit they bring to each of our lives."

Tom Martin is a project arborist with the city of Charlotte. He started the formal Treasure Tree program in Mecklenburg County in the late 1980s with a colleague while he was an urban forestry agent for the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.

"We helped identify and track trees in the county that were of ecological or historical significance," said Martin, who indicated the program was started to help create awareness to the unique value and importance these trees bring to the urban landscape.

"We recognized up to three trees of the same species as Treasure Trees if they were amongst the three largest of their species in the county or were within 80 percent of the state's record size."

During Treasure Tree Sunday, Barker will share background and photos on each of the Treasure Trees featured in her guidebook. "Each tree is situated on public property and is easily

accessible.

Some of the largest ginko, basswood, tulip poplar, laurel oak and swamp chestnut trees are among those highlighted in her book and will be featured at the May 1 session at Queens.

Williams plans to speak on the fascinating history and significance of the bigleaf magnolia, a wonderful specimen with leaves that can grow to between 2 and 3 feet in length and up to 12 inches wide. "I'll bring actual leaves for people to see and share with folks some of my research on the history of the bigleaf magnolia in our area," said Williams, who used to be a librarian at the Myers Park Branch Library. "There are fascinating stories of a French explorer and botanist, Andre Michaux, who was sent by the King of France in the late 1700s to bring back trees for use in shipbuilding and other construction projects."

"My hope with Treasure Tree Sunday: A Festival of Trees," said Barker, "is that this will be the first of many years of hosting similar events and raising the consciousness in our community of these precious resources."

Martin echoed those sentiments and indicated that it was his hope that landowners and developers exercised caution before indiscriminately clearing trees. "There may be historical significance found in some of the older and larger trees on private property," said Martin.

Barker incorporates lessons on trees and their benefits when working with her preschool class. The hands of 20 or so children in Barker's class shot up high when she asked them about the beneficial aspects of trees. It didn't take the 4- and 5-year-olds long to respond with answers that included providing us with food, shade, medicine and building materials.

One tiny youngster practically burst in an effort to share her answer as she not-so-patiently waited to be called upon. As her turn finally came, she exclaimed, "They provide us with beauty and joy!"

Barker's eyes glistened a bit with a huge smile on her face. She couldn't have been more proud.

Michael J. Solender is a Charlotte-based freelance writer.

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