



CITY OF HARRISONBURG PUBLIC WORKS

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Harrisonburg Urban Wood used to add interactive element to Arboretum

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Harrisonburg’s Urban Wood Program continues to give new life to The Friendly City’s fallen trees by providing wood materials for the soon-to-open StoryWalk and Reading Roost at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum.

Building upon past efforts, the new StoryWalk and Reading Roost will provide families and their children a way to engage in nature by following an unfolding story along the Arboretum trail under the canopy of the oak-hickory forest while walking from one “bookmark” to the next through 16 stations.

After finishing a storybook at Bookmark #16 readers are invited to stop along the trail at the Reading Roost to sit and read on their own from one of the two Little Free Libraries-Take a Book, Share a Book found there.

“This national library literacy program provides families with an outdoor, nature-inspired, on-their-own Storytime through all seasons every day of the year,” Arboretum Director Jan Sievers Mahon said. “Any reason to be outside in the woods is a good day for any one of us.”

The new structures will be celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Arboretum, 780 University Blvd., on May 5 from 4 to 6 p.m. The public is invited to join the celebration taking place at the Arboretum’s Family Garden Pavilion. Food and refreshments will be served.

The vision to add a Story Walk trail and Reading Roost to the Arboretum was inspired by an Arboretum volunteer, Mary Handley, and a class of design students studying architecture at JMU. Through James Madison University’s Architectural Design department and Design Build Dukes program, Arboretum staff found the perfect designers to make the Arboretum’s vision come to life.

Led by JMU’s professor of Architectural Design, Nick Brinen, students were involved in project planning, model design, collaboration with the City on sourcing local urban wood materials for the project and creating blueprints for the project that



(Above) JMU Architectural Design students present a new Story Walk feature crafted from locally sourced urban wood materials.

were presented to Arboretum staff for consideration. The Design Build model for an architecture studio allows students to understand that other factors and aspirations inform and guide design decisions. Moreover, the students can wear different “hats” during the project while participating with the schedule, budget, drawings, presentations, communication and use of tools.

“This project has provided our students the opportunity to set aside their ‘wants’ and listen to the aspirations of people and place to create a meaningful project,” Brinen said. “This process of designing with empathy for the client, place, and material are crucial skills our students will carry with them beyond the classroom and university experience.”

The Arboretum and JMU’s Architectural Design department are great collaborators of the Harrisonburg’s Urban Wood Utilization program. Many projects have been implemented at the Arboretum utilizing upcycled wood materials including the creation of a wooden activity cart, a “stump jump” and nature-themed playground features found in the recently renovated Family Garden, and more. Last spring, the Arboretum’s Wine and Cheese event featured the Virginia and Harrisonburg Urban Wood Utilization programs with speakers and special woodcraft displays.



“We believe that collaboration with JMU and all our surrounding educational institutions contributes to the success of these important programs,” Harrisonburg Green Space Manager Jeremy Harold said. “The City is happy to provide locally sourced materials to the students so they may use their creativity to give these fallen trees new life. These style projects provide meaningful, unique experiences for our students right here in Harrisonburg, where they may create a product that has a lasting impact on our community and is something they can be proud of.”

For more information about the ribbon-cutting, visit www.jmu.edu/arboretum/events/general-events.shtml or call the Arboretum at 540-568-3194.

For more information about the Harrisonburg Urban Wood Utilization program, visit www.harrisonburgva.gov/urban-forestry-program.

*The **City of Harrisonburg** is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.*

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