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Some Trees Go To Heaven

Logged urban trees can have happy endings

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is a follow-up to our cover story on Eugene's urban forest Nov. 21.

Arborists and city workers in Eugene have been cleaning up fallen trees and limbs and checking out possible arboreal hazards all over Eugene following the Northwest's early December storm. Many urban trees wind up as wood chips or firewood, but some trees get reused in local art and architecture.

The city of Eugene has a contract with Buena Vista Arbor Care for removal of street trees. Removed trees are first offered to wood carvers or other people who want to recycle it into art or sculpture, says Pricilla Esplin of Buena Vista. If no one wants the tree, it's made into firewood for community members who need it.

The wood from trees such as black walnut, oak, maple and other high quality hardwoods can sell for thousands of dollars, but there is no real market for urban trees, as they are more prone to having foreign objects like nails in them that could damage a saw blade. Urban trees also come to the market more randomly than those from a full-scale logging operation, making them difficult to sell. But urban trees can still be valuable.

Kurt Hupé calls himself a wood artist and a tree salvager. When he finds out that one of



Trellis made by Pony Gilbert

that are going to be cut down to make way for a building and turns them into a part of that building.

"The wood didn't come from a tree plantation, the National Forest or the Brazilian rainforest," he says. For owners who are often upset when an urban tree needs to be cut, it's a way to not waste the wood or per-

'The wood didn't come from a tree plantation, the National Forest or the Brazilian rainforest.'

— PONY GILBERT,
 LONG TOM CUSTOM
 SAWMILL



Bowl by Kurt Hupé

Eugene's street trees is due to be logged and the owners don't want to keep it for themselves, he asks for pieces of the tree to salvage and make into bowls and sculptures. He says recycling urban trees is a "gift economy" with the wood being exchanged for his art. Some of the art he gives back to the property owners, many of whom had emotional attachments to the trees.

When a bigleaf maple in front of the PeaceHealth Nurse Midwifery Birth Center was declared a hazard and had to be removed, Hupé offered to turn the wood into "placenta bowls" to give back to the center.

Hupé was inspired to begin recycling the urban forest by Don Colt, owner of Scotty's Hardwood. Scotty's Hardwood, like Springfield's Urban Lumber Company and London Lumber Inc. of Cottage Grove, recycles the urban forest into everything from coffee tables to fireplace mantles.

Pony Gilbert, who owns and operates the Long Tom Custom Sawmill, takes urban trees and mills them onsite into just about anything the property owner wants, keeping "the unique shapes and designs" of the natural wood. He takes hazardous trees or trees

manently lose that tree. "Their environmental ideals are being brought into their homes in a very tangible way," Gilbert says.

Projects include a hazardous chestnut tree whose removal was pictured in a recent EW cover story (11/21). Gilbert was dismayed at the idea people would think that tree was simply being made into firewood, when in fact the property owners arranged for it to be saved and made into flooring for a home.

One of his current projects is constructing the LCC Native American Longhouse out of donated timber. Gilbert is Native American and danced at the recent LCC Powwow. Long Tom Custom Sawmill has also worked on the Lowell Covered Bridge and transformed countless hazardous trees into cabins, porches and wood façades over otherwise conventional homes.

Gilbert, Hupé and other timber recyclers take pride in turning the by-products of Eugene's street trees into items that are both beautiful and useful as well as environmentally conscious. "Nobody wakes up in the morning wanting to rape and pillage the urban forest," says Gilbert.