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Saving doomed trees

Written by Carolyn Barnes - Special to the Town Crier

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Jenna Bayer to the rescue

Most of us know how and where to plant a six-pack of pansies and if we want a new tree, we plant something small and wait 10 or 20 years for results.

But Palo Alto landscape designer Jenna Bayer thinks big. She holds degrees in both mechanical engineering and horticulture, rescues trees as heavy as 9,500 pounds and oversees their healthy replanting.

Why would you move a full-grown tree onto your property?

"Usually people want to block an unsightly view or to shade a patio or room," Bayer said.

During a recent remodeling project, one client chose to move three trees from an interior atrium to a far corner of the same property.

"These trees included a twisted Japanese maple and a podocarpus and they are much better suited to their new situation," Bayer said. "If the homeowners had purchased trees that large, they would have cost \$15,000. But moving them cost just \$1,500 - plus installation - plus they saved these trees, instead of chopping them down."

Bayer is passionate about trees.

"God put that tree there and we owe it respect," she said in her own Palo Alto back yard recently. "Those redwoods behind you were planted in 1951. They have a history of being planted by a woman who moved here from Santa Rosa and I wanted to save them."

To rescue the half-circle of giant redwoods, which look great after seven years under her care, she first pruned out all dead wood. "I did not lift their skirts, because the low branches shade their roots," she said.

For the first year, she irrigated the trees deeply, added a good mulch to their

soil to keep it from drying out, and then set up a drip watering system around the trees' drip line, which delivers, in the summer months, about 50 gallons of water once per week (a 30-minute watering session).

"You want to keep the soil damp so that it is alive with good microorganisms," Bayer said.

Her tree brokering is a sideline to Bayer's main career as a landscape designer.

"What I try to do is help people funnel all the landscaping possibilities down to their own personality - what kind of design, installation, maintenance level and mature garden is appropriate?" she said. "I love it when I can help someone become a gardener, like my Los Altos Hills client who is an executive and works hard all day. We put in landscape lighting and now, she can go out into her garden and work after dark."

The same client also enjoys a recently installed arboretum in Los Altos Hills - of trees imported from Oregon.

"Most of the trees I install are from Oregon, Washington or Canada, except for olives and podocarpus, which I get from Southern California," Bayer said.

Bayer recently rescued a group of trees from the Portland Convention Center, where she discovered that a new parking lot was being built.

"Here were these *Zelkova serratas*, a deciduous tree that has lush green foliage in the summer, a good shape, and which turns bright, fire engine red in the fall - it's a cousin of the elm," Bayer said. "They could have chain-sawed them, but a broker I work with up there found out about them and made them available."

Sometimes Bayer moves trees out of established Peninsula gardens, but the conditions have to be just right.

"Ideally, a tree to be moved will have no more than a 7- 8- inch diameter trunk, although we have moved trees with 10-inch trunks. Most trees are really adolescent at that size, but that is about the largest you want to go," she said. "Usually a tree of this diameter is no more than 28 feet tall and has a width no greater than 17 feet."

Accessibility factors, such as nearby buildings, power lines and the grade of the surrounding area, are major considerations when Bayer is asked whether a tree can be moved, rather than cut down.

"We use cranes and a huge machine called a Gradall, which is all-terrain. The tree must be balanced on the Gradall at its center of gravity, which is between the canopy and the root ball," Bayer said. "The season of the year is important, too - you want to do it when the tree is dormant. I say it's like

carrying a sleeping child into the house, you want to disturb it as little as possible."

When analyzing whether a tree is worth moving, Bayer considers, in addition to whether or not the tree is accessible, whether it has received enough water to survive a move ("Believe me, I can tell if a tree has been watered properly," she said), whether it is a desirable specimen, and whether a ready buyer is available.

"I show up and I tell people the truth; that is the only secret to my success," she said. "I love what I do and I am thankful I get to do it; nature is everything to me."

For information, call Jenna Bayer Garden Design 424-8153 or fax: 494-0877.