

Email correspondence with Dave MacManus – Assistant Director, Facilities & Ground Services

Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida is noted for its many majestic Live Oaks that have large spreading branches draped with Spanish Moss. Live Oaks provide welcome shade during the long, hot summers and give a graceful southern character to the campus landscape. The Live Oak has a lifespan that is measured in centuries, but unfortunately many of the trees on campus are suffering from the loss of roots and soil compaction due to the construction of roads, sidewalks and new buildings. Tragically some trees have been lost from this stress- a condition known as “urban tree decline”. Some of the Live Oaks are slowly dying and will be missed in the future. FSU’s enrollment is expanding, yet space for new buildings in the main campus is restricted and some Live Oaks have been cut down to make room for construction.

Scott Cisson, the Director of Grounds and Landscaping at FSU, had previously directed the Grounds Department of Arizona State University where he was instrumental in founding the Arizona State Arboretum. Scott’s background in landscape architecture also gave him a respect for the value of large trees. Scott decided to do what he could to save the Live Oak at the Student Success Center site due to its value and the feasibility of such a project. Scott noted that the tree would only have to be moved about 200 feet away to preserve it. Much of the expense of having large trees moved is in the coordination of controlling traffic, temporarily moving telephone and power lines out of the way and the rental of large equipment to perform the task. The Student Success site had no overhead obstructions and the distance that the tree would need to be moved was minimal. Scott was able to convince FSU Facilities that moving the tree would be a worthwhile project after consulting with Environmental Design, a firm that specializing in the transplanting of large trees.

On June 18, 2008 Environmental Design’s field workers dug a trench around the Student Success Live Oak that severed long lateral roots and formed the sides of the future root ball. Soil was then placed back around the tree and special attention was given to keep the root system adequately watered. In early September the trench was reopened and the sides of the root ball were secured with wire and burlap. A series of long metal large pipes were driven underneath the root ball by the use of bull dozers to form a base to support the 200,000 + pound tree on for moving. Two tractors pulled a heavy metal cable underneath the root ball to sever deeper support roots. The support pipes were clamped together to form a secure platform for the tree. Unfortunately there was not large enough equipment available locally to handle moving the tree so a Caterpillar 345 Excavator and support bull dozers were used to push the tree to its new site 200 feet down slope from where it originally grew. The root ball fractured during the move which compromised the health of the tree. Unfortunately the new site lacked adequate drainage and the root system has been exposed to excessive moisture. The health of this first transplanted tree has steadily declined and the tree currently has extensive dead wood in the canopy yet some new sprouts. In 2010 two additional Live Oaks were transplanted for the construction of the Wellness Center. One of these trees defoliated shortly after being moved-yet today is the healthiest of the three large Live Oaks that have been moved on campus. The other tree has a thinner canopy and is in moderately good health today.