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The 2021 Oregon urban and community forestry awards honor construction firm and people in Grants Pass, Wilsonville

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Department of Forestry and the non-profit organization Oregon Community Trees (OCT) have announced this year's Oregon Urban and Community Forestry Award honorees. They are:

- Essex General Construction, with offices in Eugene and Lake Oswego
- Grants Pass Urban Forester Tony Mecum
- Wilsonville City Councilor Charlotte Lehan

Eugene Urban Forestry Management Analyst Scott Altenhoff nominated Essex because, "Their company's commitment to doing the right thing and going the extra-mile for trees and green infrastructure is truly exceptional."

Altenhoff stated that at all stages of a project the Essex team shows an enthusiasm for protecting existing trees or planting new, high-quality trees. As an example, he cited the Midtown project, a mixed-use, multi-story building in downtown Eugene.

"The design and construction teams worked tirelessly to retain as many street trees as possible at this site (most other developers would have removed them all). Also, they were super diligent

about protecting the trees to be retained, and they even milled and repurposed two street trees that had to be removed for the project and integrated the wood into the ceiling of the ballet studio on the ground floor,” he wrote in his nomination.

The Oregon Department of Forestry’s Kristin Ramstad, who manages the agency’s Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program, said the award to Essex recognizes the importance of developers seeing the value of retaining healthy, non-invasive large trees during redevelopment.

“If a builder takes appropriate measures to protect root zones and avoid soil compaction, these mature trees provide an immediate asset to the people who move into the new housing or commercial spaces,” she said.

Oregon Community Trees Vice President Teresa Gustafson chairs the committee that reviews nominations. Of Lehan’s, Gustafson said, “City Councilor Lehan is a stalwart and tireless advocate for Wilsonville’s urban forest, as well as trees throughout Oregon. This award recognizes her extraordinary dedication to protecting and preserving significant trees.”

As Wilsonville’s mayor in the 1990s, Lehan implemented the city’s first tree protection ordinance. She founded Wilsonville’s Heritage Tree Program to recognize trees having historical significance, and continues to serve on the Program’s Committee. She also serves on the state-level Oregon Heritage Tree Committee, where she has successfully nominated three Oregon Heritage Trees. Lehan also helped Metro select important natural sites to protect, leading to creation of the Graham Oaks Nature Park – where an oak-pine savanna has been recreated on former farmland.

Of Mecum’s nomination, Gustafson said, “We could see from the volume of material submitted with his nomination that, in just one year, Tony has become a well-respected resource to Grants Pass staff, City Council, the Urban Tree Committee and the public.”

She added that, “City staff in Grants Pass note that the City gets more compliments from the public about Tony than anyone else. Staff attribute that to how calmly and helpfully he handles his interactions, explaining the tree code and offering expertise to find solutions to tree-related issues.”

Mecum's long list of accomplishments in office includes:

- starting Grants Pass's first citywide tree inventory
- helping create a prequalified arborist list for landowners needing tree care
- increasing the number of species on the city's approved tree list by 100%
- conducting appraisals of trees lost in car accidents so the City can receive restitution
- helping create an urban forestry webpage for all things tree related in Grants Pass

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