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2007 East Campus Arbor Day Celebration

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2007 East Campus Arbor Day Celebration
Wednesday, April 18
11:30 a.m.
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor

As we celebrate Arbor Day, it seems fitting to begin with a J. Sterling Morton quote. "The cultivation of trees is the cultivation of the good, the beautiful, and the ennobling in man," Morton once said, "adding", "and for one, I wish to see it become universal."

J. Sterling Morton came to the Nebraska Territory in 1854. Because he "missed the trees" of his native Detroit, he "used" the *Nebraska News* in Nebraska City, where he was editor, "to spread" his enthusiasm for trees.

Not quite 20 years later, on April 10, 1872, Nebraskans celebrated the first Arbor Day with "a prize" offered the person who "properly planted" the most trees. It's estimated more than one million trees were planted that day.

Today our nation "officially" celebrates Arbor Day the last Friday of April, but I suspect many Nebraskans consider

"every day we plant a tree" a mini-Arbor Day. Certainly you will find "many" here who share Morton's enthusiasm for trees, "individually" and through the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Nebraska Forest Service, Green Industry partners, and organizations such as the Nebraska Community Forestry Council, Nebraska Arborists Association, and the Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association. I'm told collectively, these organizations "touch the lives" of more than 90 percent of Nebraska's population.

I believe Nebraskans "recognize" the value and benefits of the over 11 million trees in our cities and towns, and "understand" the importance of sustaining and strengthening this valuable resource. That's good, because "we" in this state earlier "nicknamed" "the Tree Planters State" need to be planting more trees. Continually.

A combination of "severe" weather, "prolonged" drought, and "serious" insect and disease "outbreaks" have severely affected our trees in Nebraska. I understand we've lost

approximately one half of our community tree resources since the ~~last~~ ^{late} 1970s.

That's why ReTree Nebraska, a comprehensive statewide ~~tree-planting initiative~~ now under way, is so important. ReTree Nebraska aims to raise public awareness of trees' value, reverse the decline of Nebraska's community tree resource, and improve the diversity and sustainability of trees in communities across the state for generations to come.

ReTree Nebraska is a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Forest Service, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, University of Nebraska Rural Initiative, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, our Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, and Nebraska green-industry organizations and associations.

I mentioned earlier that it's estimated more than one million trees were planted that first Arbor Day in 1872. One of the goals of ReTree Nebraska is to properly plant and maintain at least one million new community trees in the

next 10 years – trees that are high quality, large growing, and long-lived. “If Nebraska ancestors could reach that number in one day in the 1800s, surely we, working together, can reach it over the next decade!

I’m going to end my remarks today as I began them, with a J. Sterling Morton quote, this one appropo to ReTree Nebraska. Morton said, and I quote: “Each generation takes the earth as trustees.” We ought to bequeath to posterity as many forests and orchards as we have exhausted and consumed.”

Wouldn’t it be great if, working together, we bequeathed posterity even more? I look forward to our doing just that. Thank you.