

Firm Gets Arboretum off Ground

By Erik Skindrud, regional editor



OBS landscape architects of Raleigh, N.C. produced this plan for Caswell County Arboretum for less than one-fourth of the service's market value. Additional funds are needed for construction. Image courtesy of OBS landscape architects.

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Mayberry-like Yanceyville may be short on funds, but the North Carolina town has struck gold with tireless volunteers and planning support from Raleigh-based OBS landscape architects. With a population of just 2,000, Yanceyville is Caswell County, N.C.'s county seat. Local government, however, is not able to fund many parks or restoration projects. That leaves a big portion of the town's historic district to the Caswell County Horticultural Club. For the past several years, the group's volunteers have labored to create a Caswell Community Arboretum. The site sits below the town's beautifully-restored 1861 courthouse, and includes the old Caswell jail and one-room school.

The club wanted a facility with professional design and modern guest amenities. Limited funding was (and is) a hurdle. Recently though, landscape architect Brian Starkey helped the effort create an arboretum layout that any community would be proud of.

Principal at OBS landscape architects in Raleigh, Starkey heard about the effort and offered to put together the master plan. The club pitched in a modest amount to help cover costs, and the team at OBS spent close to 100 hours drawing up plans for more than half a dozen native plant zones. The theme areas are designated Woodland Bosque, Evergreen, Bird & Butterfly and Woodland Edge gardens—among several others. The project will also include an inviting turfgrass area for picnics and recreation, a sun and rain shelter, a parking lot and paths that will weave amongst trees scattered over the 1.5-acre site.

The master-planning bill would have added up to more than \$10,000, but the firm completed the job for just \$2,500, Starkey said. OBS is already working on another pro-bono design for a playground in Raleigh's historic Oakwood neighborhood.



Caswell County's jailhouse will be preserved as part of the project. The old facility was in use until 1973.

The money saved through the firm's generosity will be put toward the purchase of a small forest worth of native evergreen and deciduous trees. The species were chosen for their fruit and acorn-bearing qualities. Attracting birds to the site is a prime project aim.

The volunteers (all women over 50) have already spent close to two years cutting invasive bamboo at the site, which is surrounded by a forest of native trees and shrubs. The group starts planting this fall, but the parking lot, shelter and other site amenities will require up to \$300,000 to realize. The effort has now raised about \$40,000 in USDA and other grants, but needs more support to get the job done.

The horticulture club is asking Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse to donate materials, but a big portion of the construction cost remains to be raised, the club's Yancey M. Smith said. For this reason, several years of hard work likely remain before the arboretum is finished.

While heartened by their progress, the women realize that plenty of sweat and dirt remain in front of them. "We're a group of strong, hearty women," Smith said with a laugh. "But if I live to see this completed I'll be delighted!" The arboretum will teach locals to preserve Piedmont North Carolina's hardwood forests—and about the harm posed by invasive, non-native plants, she said.

Anyone with ideas (or funds) to share can get in touch with Smith at wosmith@mindspring.com

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