

## **Capital Trees Has Its Roots in Three Chopt Garden Club**

What began with Three Chopt Garden Club in the summer of 2009 as an idea to clean up the large, ugly intersection at Cary Street and Three Chopt Roads has since become a major force in the greening of Richmond.

While the intersection was an eyesore, it also marked the eastern terminus of the historic Algonquin Indian Three Chopt Trail, from which the club takes its name. Then president Jeanette McKittrick convinced the award-winning architectural firm 3north to design a garden for the large, triangular median. She took the idea to the membership, who unanimously approved the plan. She and Catherine Whitham convinced the City of Richmond to donate labor and curbing and James River Nurseries provided trees and perennials. Trash, weeds and broken concrete were replaced with a shady island in the middle of a harsh, urban environment and unwittingly, Capital Trees had its start.

That fall, Jeanette McKittrick and Bootsie McCracken Rogers heard Rachel Flynn, then Richmond's Director of Community Planning, speak at the GCV Conservation Forum. Richmond's trees were in deplorable shape. In December, Jeanette gathered Rachel and the presidents of the other three Richmond GCV clubs, Jane Cowles of Boxwood, Evie Scott of James River and Susan Landin of Tuckahoe, in her SUV, and they took a ride around the city. Capital Trees was born.

But it was always about more than trees. In May 2010, the GCV recognized CT's vision with the Bessie Boccock Carter Conservation Award, igniting the 14th Street project. The project combined the removal of tons of concrete with the design and installation of engineered bio-filtration cells, fancy tree wells that capture storm water and filter out pollution as it runs downhill to the James River. Completed in 2012, swamp white oaks and ginkgoes, native irises and lilies now provide green relief to the eye and the river. The project was expanded northward in 2015.

The following year, CT took on Great Shiplock Park, its first waterfront project, at the western trailhead of the Virginia Capital Trail. Over 1,500 plants were installed there, including a large, beautiful rain garden to help mitigate storm water run-off from Dock Street. Native river birches, sycamores, and sweet bay magnolias, oakleaf hydrangeas, Joe Pye Weed and more have been put to work, securing the banks of the historic James River and Kanawha Canal and filtering water from urban streets above. For GSP, Capital Trees received partial funding from the GCV's Commonwealth Award in 2014.

In November 2013, Three Chopt members joined the other clubs in planting over 10,000 narcissus bulbs along Dock Street at the entrance to the park, and another idea began to take shape.

After months of arduous negotiations with the City of Richmond and CSX Corporation, fundraising and friend-raising, ground was broken for Capital Trees' Low Line in June 2015. What was once a derelict rail yard, choked with invasive weeds and trash, is now taking shape as a beautiful 5.5 acre riparian buffer on the historic James River and

Kanawha Canal in Shockoe Bottom, an area famous for some of America's and Richmond's earliest and most significant history. The first of three phases in the five-year project has been completed, with continuing plans for eradication of invasive plants and installation of over 51,00 trees, shrubs, perennials, grasses and bulbs, primarily native.

While Capital Trees has spread its branches to downtown and East End Richmond. It took root at "the triangle", which remains the responsibility of Three Chopt, and has been cared for ever since under the leadership of Rhonda Sutton and husband Kelly, an honorary member of the club. In addition, Bootsie and Jeanette, Three Chopt members Melinda Hardy and Alice Siegel serve on Capital Trees' board of trustees. Major funders are listed on the website. [www.CapitalTrees.org](http://www.CapitalTrees.org)

Building community pride and environmental and landscape educational opportunities, creating jobs and welcoming culture, protecting the river and providing a canvas for Richmond to reveal and narrate the historic cultural and environmental significance of Richmond on the James, Capital Trees **advocates for the powerful connection between people and nature.**

Jeanette McKittrick  
Three Chopt Garden Club