

High on this area icon's list was beautification through trees

Roger Milliken was a visionary. Among all of his many accomplishments, he saw the value of trees. He wanted to help the city of Spartanburg and its surrounding areas become more beautiful.

In 1956, Mr. Milliken, who passed away Thursday, purchased the Peach Queen Farm in order for the internationally recognized Deering-Milliken Research Center to move to Spartanburg. The facility was built and the grounds were beautifully landscaped.

It was at this time that Mr. Milliken hired Richard Webel. The two men worked closely together and developed a great friendship. Mr. Milliken often made the statement that "you landscape with trees, and shrubbery only puts the icing on the cake." This was something he learned from Mr. Webel.

Wofford College and Spartanburg Day School are examples of the "hands-on" work Mr. Milliken did to create beauty. In our community, he was known to be present very early on Saturday mornings to oversee not only the building of buildings but also the planting of the



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trees. Both campuses are lovely and inviting thanks to Mr. Milliken.

In the early '80s, Mr. Milliken had the idea of purchasing land in downtown Spartanburg to create a park. He challenged his friend, Walter Montgomery Sr., to raise the money to purchase the land. Mr. Milliken proceeded to have his landscape friend, Mr. Webel, design and create a park and then named it for Mr. Montgomery, calling it Montgomery Commons.

In 1980, the Men's Garden Club planted 186 Red Sunset maples along South Pine Street from St. John Street to the Milliken Research Center. Then later, 200 Willow Oaks along with some Natchez Crape myrtles were planted down East Main Street. Mr. Milliken gave support

to both projects financially and enthusiastically.

Also in the late '80s, Mr. Milliken started the Noble Tree Foundation that continues to have a great influence with plantings. The first project was to clean up Heron Circle. Over 100 dump-truck loads of trash and junk trees were removed. As you look at it today, you will see the great transformation.

In the early '90s, Mr. Milliken hired Dr. Michael Dirr, a world renowned tree expert, to come to Spartanburg to give him some ideas about what trees would do well if planted in our area. Dr. Dirr had a renewed interest in the Yoshino Cherry tree and influenced the Men's Garden Club to plant South Pine Street with these lovely trees.

When you arrive at the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport, you will see the vision Mr. Milliken had. Later, the entrance was beautifully landscaped when the interstate exchange was redone. Mr. Milliken was involved in all of the details of this project, from trees to ground cover. He had the vision to install the lovely water feature you find as you

drive into the airport.

Mr. Milliken's most recent projects were focused on energy efficiency. He loved Spartanburg Day School and Wofford College. He made a challenge to these schools to become more energy efficient and LEEDS certified. Most of the work for the Spartanburg Day School was completed this past summer. He was currently working on this project at Wofford with the vision of the college saving money on all forms of energy and water conservation. He realized the value of energy and water efficiency. He knew the schools would save money by a more conservative use of energy and water.

Another one of the projects that is on the drawing board is to plant Main Street with trees. He conceived the idea to line Main Street with Noble trees and make it visually attractive. He wanted to see this project become a reality.

My first impression of Spartanburg in the late '80s was the magnificent avenue of Willow Oaks that lined I-85 and the Crape Myrtles that were in the median. When I came to look at Converse College, I was overcome by the beauty of the trees lining the interstate and the then-planted Crape Myrtles that ran from the research center to Pinewood Center. This was July, and the

Crape Myrtles were in full flower.

This impression has lasted a lifetime. I am sure others have had similar impressions.

Mr. Milliken wanted our community to be a beautiful place to live and work. He had a vision that this could be done. We all need to become involved and take on the challenge of planting more trees in our lovely city. What a difference this man has made!

Dr. Michael Dirr recently said that because of Mr. Milliken's work, "The trees are now speaking to the Spartanburg community."

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