

MARTI VANRAVENSWAAY PARK

IT ALL STARTED WITH TREES



Marti VanRavenswaay, Chairperson of Park and Recreation Board involved with the Green Oaks median tree planting at Little Road - October 23, 1985. Photo: Marti VanRavenswaay.

At Marti VanRavenswaay Park, trees are the focal point. They offer a sense of the environment, a natural respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. But the trees do more than provide a buffer from the outside world. They tell an important story about the history of Arlington's urban forest.

The park's thick clusters of blackjack oaks epitomize the enormous band of trees that once blanketed the Cross Timbers, a narrow strip of land that extends from Kansas to Central Texas. On September 29, 1843, the Cross Timbers area became a political boundary when the Treaty of Bird's Fort was signed by members of the Republic of Texas and leaders of nine Indian tribes. In the treaty, the Cross Timbers area was set as a border to separate Indian and white settlements, thus ending years of bloodshed over territorial rights.

Over a century later, those same trees from Cross Timbers would inspire more political movements in Arlington as the battle to preserve an urban forest began. Recognized as one of the key players in protecting Arlington's trees, Marti VanRavenswaay took action to make sure the historic trees of Cross Timbers would not be completely destroyed in order to make way for progress.

When VanRavenswaay and her family moved to their second home in Arlington, they witnessed areas being developed without consideration for nature. Seeing such development without concern for trees, small creeks and wildlife was disturbing to VanRavenswaay's children, who were six and nine at the time.

"My children were the ones who were adamant about not cutting trees down," said VanRavenswaay. "They were the ones who helped me realize that developers should maintain much of the natural setting when developing."



While many people would have thrown up their hands and shrugged at the "price of progress," VanRavenswaay's children provoked her to take action. "My boys saw the natural areas they loved so much quickly disappearing," she said. "They inspired me to stop this from happening."

With her children's interest at heart, VanRavenswaay began a public service career that has spanned over many years. She has been an important member of organizations such as PTA, Arlington Parks and Recreation, Arlington City Council, Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Arlington Arts Council, Arlington Classics Academy, Arlington Clean Team, Arlington Initiative, Arlington Task Force on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse, Arlington Cancer Society and Friends of Johnson Creek. In 1991, VanRavenswaay's public career reached a milestone when she was elected as Precinct 2 Tarrant County Commissioner.

While VanRavenswaay's responsibilities have changed over the years, she remains faithful to the mission she took on when her children saw the destruction of their neighborhood trees. Today, VanRavenswaay remains committed to the preservation of Arlington's urban forest through the protection of trees, parks and open spaces.

