

The Daily Item

Rooted in community | Lewisburg, Selinsgrove celebrate trees on more than Arbor Day

By Katrina Hook | For The Daily Item and Inside PA | Mar 10, 2026

As winter melts into spring, the Susquehanna Valley is preparing to honor Arbor Day on Friday, April 24. Local officials and educators hope to inspire communities to sustain environmental and cultural assets for future generations.

One program helping with that goal is Tree City USA. The national program was founded by the Arbor Day Foundation in 1976, in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. The initiative aims to celebrate communities that commit to effective forest management, including Selinsgrove and Lewisburg.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, 48 percent of the U.S. population lives in one of more than 3,587 Tree Cities. This spring, Lewisburg will celebrate 41 years as a Tree City and has received The Tree City Growth Award — which the organization describes as an honor presented to communities demonstrating higher levels of tree care and community engagement during the calendar year — three times. Selinsgrove has participated in the program for 17 years and received a Tree City USA recognition award in 2022.

To qualify for Tree City USA, municipalities must meet the following requirements:

1. Establish a dedicated group or department responsible for tree care.
2. Adopt a city ordinance that governs the planting, maintenance, and removal of public trees.
3. Maintain an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita for urban forestry.
4. Observe Arbor Day with a formal proclamation and celebration.

Participating communities receive recognition and signage, as well as what the foundation describes as a “boost in community pride.” Across all 50 states, more than \$2 billion is invested annually in planting nearly 991,000 trees.

The Arbor Day Foundation focuses on planting trees in populated areas, but welcome cities of all sizes to take part in the initiative, noting, “trees improve the world wherever they’re planted.”

Tree City USA advocates putting effort into caring about the environment, which influences every element of daily life. “People love to live in a city that takes pride in itself, and these projects can have an even bigger impact on our future,” the organization’s website said, emphasizing the lasting impacts of tree planting efforts:

1. Climate change: Trees store carbon dioxide from the air in its wood, slowing the buildup of gases in the atmosphere.
2. Mental and physical health: Walking in parks and access to green spaces encourage community members to stay active and reduce the impacts of mental illnesses.
3. Pollution removal: Particulate matter from fossil fuels is filtrated by trees, removing air pollution that can reduce the impacts of asthma.
4. Shading and flooding: In some areas, shade from trees can cool cities by up to ten degrees, while also providing structural protection to soil that lessens the impacts of flooding and runoff.
5. Community pride: Tree programs provide an opportunity for a community to take ownership in their town's environmental responsibilities.

“Everyone has a tree story,” said Kathryn Maguet, executive director of the Weis Center for the Performing Arts at Bucknell University. “That's the genesis of the Weis Center's Tree series this year. Artists from all disciplines and all walks of life have always been inspired by the beauty and majesty of trees.”

The Weis Center plans to explore trees from an academic, environmental, and artistic perspective. The center advocated that “Trees, such as the venerable elders that stand in The Grove on our campus, connect us to a larger-than-human scale, embodying a geologic time we can see, smell and touch.”

In an effort to highlight the history and meaning of trees, the Weis Center Tree Series will include several performances, lectures and even walks led by professors and outside performers.

Lewisburg operates a Shade Tree Commission, which seeks tree care educational opportunities while sharing the responsibility of tree care with its residents. The Shade Tree Commission acknowledges trees are typically “the first impression that a visitor has of a community,” placing emphasis on creating an atmosphere guests will enjoy “lingering” in as they shop.

In Selinsgrove, the Shade Tree Commission is joined by additional forces. While the Selinsgrove Borough Council gives the Shade Tree Commission exclusive custody of borough trees and regularly completes planting initiatives, Susquehanna University students are taking efforts a step further.

Susquehanna University senior Jay Schofield serves as a student representative for a newly formed campus tree committee and intends to enforce tree rules while carrying out educational projects.

“People don't always think about how trees impact the world around us,” Schofield said. “The trees here are really special, and we're excited to play a part in keeping them around.”

The committee is planning an inaugural Arbor Day event and hopes to secure funding for additional plantings. The campus is also pursuing designation as a Higher Education Tree Campus, an Arbor Day Foundation initiative extending Tree City USA concepts into educational settings.