

Vancouver mayor plants first of 3,000 cherry trees

BY STEVE WHYSALL, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 2, 2011



Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson plants a cherry tree to mark the annual cherry tree festival at City Hall in Vancouver, BC., March 2, 2011. With him from left: Tersa Coady, Doreen Lau and Deputy Consul General for Japan, Kinji Shinoda

Photograph by: NICK PROCAYLO, PNG

The first “birthday blossom” cherry tree to commemorate the city’s 125th anniversary was planted in a grove outside city hall Wednesday by Mayor Gregor Robertson.

Three thousand ornamental cherry trees are being sold by the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival at a special discount price to commemorate the city’s 125th anniversary on April 6.

“When the first cherry blossoms bloom, it is a turning point; we all know spring is in the air,” Robertson said.

The planting, one of seven trees at the corner of Yukon Street and West 12th Avenue, was also part of the city’s continuing initiative to make Vancouver a greener city by increasing the number of trees on streets and in parks and public places.

The cherry trees are being offered for \$40, half the price of what they would sell for at a garden centre. Funding for the trees was provided by the David and Dorothy Lam Foundation.

Three popular varieties of ornamental cherry trees are being offered: 2,400 'Akebono', 400 'Kanzan' and 200 'Yae-Beni-shidare.' About 1,500 have already been sold.

Festival organizers are suggesting that one of the trees would also make a great gift for Mother's Day in May or a way to mark a special occasion, such as a wedding, anniversary or birthday.

Linda Poole, founder and executive director of the festival, says the goal is to see the trees planted all over the city in home gardens and other private property locations.

But the main purpose of the cherry blossom festival, she says, is to "bring the community together, not just through planting the cherry trees, but through an appreciation of the city's natural beauty."

The mayor said the festival is a "signature event" that highlights the blooming of the more than 37,000 cherry trees that bring spring to city streets.

"The festival is still a bit of a sleeper," Robertson said. "It hasn't had the exposure that many other cities' blossom festivals have. It will be good to see it grow and thrive."

Before the official tree planting, there was a performance by traditional Japanese taiko drummers and a reading of haiku poems on a cherry blossom theme by Bard on the Beach director Christopher Gaze.

Each year, the festival holds a "haiku invitational," which attracts entries from all over the world. Gaze read the winning entries from last year.

About 50 people attended the tree planting event, including Kinji Shinoda, deputy consul-general of Japan, and Doreen Lau, of the David and Dorothy Lam Foundation.

David Lam, B.C.'s former lieutenant-governor who died last Nov. 22, was a big fan of cherry blossoms.

"The cherry tree brings joy; one's enjoyment of it brings invisible wealth," he once said.

People can order one of the trees from the festival's website at www.vcbf.ca.

Trees will be ready for pickup at the end of the month from five locations listed on the website.

The cherry blossom festival officially gets underway on March 26 at a Cherry Jam event at Burrard SkyTrain station and continues to April 22. See the festival's website for a complete schedule of events.

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