

Tree-planting volunteers show gratitude for wetlands

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The [Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge](#) in New Orleans has something special to be thankful about, just in time for the holiday. A group of 25 people from the Tulane University community spent the Saturday before Thanksgiving planting 250 trees in the refuge, one of the last remaining marsh areas adjacent to Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne.

Organized by Tulane alumnus [John Williams](#), who heads a local architecture firm and is active in environmental issues, the service project involved [President Mike Fitts](#) along with faculty members, students and staff members from the School of Architecture's [Tulane City Center](#), [Tulane Law School](#) and the [School of Science and Engineering](#).

Williams began planning the trip four months ago with the aim of introducing Fitts to issues surrounding the importance of Louisiana wetlands. The architect has served for years on the Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Protection, Restoration and Conservation.

"It's important for him (Fitts) to understand, as the wetlands go, so does Tulane," Williams said.



The first stop on the tree-planting mission on Saturday (Nov. 21) was the Common Ground Relief Nursery in the Lower Ninth Ward, where President Mike Fitts and other volunteers selected trees that would be bound for Bayou Sauvage. (Photos by Cheryl Gerber)



Pulling a cartload of young trees, Beth Wee leads a group into the marsh. Wee is a professor of practice in psychology and associate dean of undergraduate programs in the School of Science and Engineering.



With shovels in hand, a group of Tulane volunteers heads off to plant trees at 24,000-acre Bayou Sauvage, the largest urban National Wildlife Refuge in the United States. The diverse habitat supports over 340 bird species and is located within massive hurricane protection levees built to protect eastern New Orleans from storm surges and flooding.



Fitts, right, with the aid of Maggie Hansen, director of Tulane City Center, gets his tree in the ground during the environmental project. "It was heavy work digging the holes, placing the trees and packing the soil," Fitts said on Monday. "It also was notably muddier than a typical day at the office. But it was fun. I loved spending time with students from all over the university. I learned a lot about the deterioration of Louisiana's wetlands. The trip was both rewarding and enlightening."



Pausing in their wetlands work are, from left, Jennifer Summers, PhD student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology; Mike Blum, associate professor in ecology and evolutionary biology and director of the [Tulane / Xavier Center for Bioenvironmental Research](#); Mark Davis, director of the [Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy](#) at Tulane Law School; John Williams; Fitts; and volunteer Maeghan Olivier Doherty.