The West Virginia Chapter
of
The American Chestnut Foundation
NEWSLETTER

In the heart of American chestnut's natural range

March 2025

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Anne Frank's Chestnut Tree

Most Americans are familiar with the story of **Anne Frank**, a German-born Jewish girl who kept a diary documenting her life in hiding amid Nazi persecution during the German occupation of the Netherlands. A celebrated diarist, Frank described everyday life from her family's hiding place in an Amsterdam attic.

In the period of over two years (6 July 1942 to 4 August 1944) that Anne Frank spent in hiding in the Secret Annex, nature and her longing for freedom played an ever greater role. Through a window in the attic that was not blacked out, Anne could see the sky, birds and a chestnut tree. She wrote about the tree in her diary three times, the last time on 13 May 1944.

'Our chesntut tree is in full bloom. It's covered in leaves and even more beautiful than last year.'

13 May 1944

During a speech in 1968, **Otto Frank** described his thoughts when he read Anne's diary for the first time: 'How could I have known how much it meant to Anne to see a patch of blue sky, to observe the seagulls as they flew, and how important the chestnut tree was for her, when I think that she never showed any interest in nature. Still, she longed for it when she felt like a bird in a cage. Only the thought of the freedom of nature gave her comfort. But she kept all those feelings to herself.'

The chestnut tree that Anne referred to was not a European chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), but a horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*). *Castanea* species are in the *Fagaceae* family along with beech and oak, while the *Aesculus* species are in the *Sapindaceae* family with maple and buckeye.

The horse chestnut that Anne saw daily from her window was over 170 years old, and stood in the courtyard garden of number 188 Keizersgracht. It was one of the oldest chestnut trees in Amsterdam. When in 2005 it was found that the tree was suffering from a serious disease, the Anne Frank House decided, with the permission of the owner, to gather chestnuts, germinate them, and donate the saplings to schools named after Anne Frank and other organizations. Many Anne Frank Schools and other organizations

and locations around the world have now been given a young tree. In 2009, 150 descendants of the tree were donated to the *Amsterdamse Bos Woodland Park*. One year later in 2010, the original tree succumbed to a wind storm. It survived the war but it could not survive decay and wind. In 2013, after three years in quarantine, the last young trees from the Anne Frank House seedling project were planted at a number of locations in the U.S. (Los Angeles, CA, Omaha, NE, Melrose Park, PA, White Plains, NY, Branchburg, NJ and at the United Nations in NY). In 2014, one of the seedlings from Anne Frank's tree was planted on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol.

A horse chestnut and Anne Frank's diary in a display case at the Anne Frank museum in Amsterdam.

While Anne's chestnut was not a European chestnut, trees can greatly impact the human heart, and this is a story worth sharing. Our love of American chestnut and our longing for its restoration have brought us all to The American Chestnut Foundation. Trees can evoke an emotional connection and they connect people with the natural world. Anne Frank's connection to her horse chestnut is a testament to the power of nature.

As a note, Anne Frank died in February 1945 at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Nazi Germany. She was 15 years old.

Tribute to President Jimmy Carter

The American Chestnut Foundation lost an avid supporter with the death of **President Jimmy Carter**. He lived an extraordinary life, not only as a President of the United States, but as a statesman and the head of his family. Our family was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet President and Mrs. Carter. Back when our older daughter won a national award as an eighth grader in 1995, President and Mrs. Carter presented the awards in Washington, D.C. After the ceremony, President Carter opened the floor for questions from the youth that were present. One question was, 'what do you see as your greatest achievement in life'. We were expecting brokering the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel or the establishment of the Department of Education as his answer. Without hesitation, President Carter responded, ' I am most proud of marrying Rosalynn'.

Dr. Will Pitt, President and CEO of TACF wrote an article about President Carter. I share his words with you.

Dear friends:

The board of directors and staff of The American Chestnut Foundation mourn the loss of President Jimmy Carter, who died at the age of 100 in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. An Honorary Director at TACF since the very early days of the organization, he was one of the first luminaries to endorse the Foundation's mission to return the iconic American chestnut to its native range. President Carter recalled chestnut trees growing in his yard (one of the most southern sites of the tree's range) when he was a boy and that he could take the nuts to school to trade for "a couple of really nice marbles."

But his real hope was the science behind the restoration and how he felt it would be a boon to conservation and ecological restoration. To take part in the outreach and efforts of chestnut restoration, he helped coordinate a chestnut demonstration orchard

at The Carter Center in 2016, followed by a dedication he also attended in 2017.

President Carter participated in TACF's award-winning documentary film, *Clear Day Thunder: Rescuing the American Chestnut,* that was released to the public in spring 2024. In the film, he shared his passion for chestnut restoration: "I was very eager to help, and so ever since it began, I've been helping to raise money, and helping to promote the knowledge among people about the chestnut foundation [TACF]."

His family legacy continues with the appointment of his daughter-in-law Becky Carter to TACF's board in 2021. A former chief development officer at The Carter Center, Becky now helps the organization with government relations and organizational governance.

As we reflect on President Carter's influential life and contributions, we are inspired to carry forward his vision and dedication toward restoring the American chestnut, creating a legacy that will continue to grow for generations to come.

Warm regards,

William Pitt
President & CEO
The American Chestnut Foundation

Chapter's Committee Meeting

The January chapter's committee meeting was led by **Martin Cipollini**, chapter's committee president. The introduction of an AI-generated meeting summary feature in Zoom was discussed, with **Catherine Martini**, TACF's Northern Regional Outreach Coordinator, confirming that traditional minutes would still be produced unless a committee vote indicated otherwise. Catherine provided an overview of the newly launched Volunteer Local system, highlighting its user-friendly interface and customizable applications for chapters. An automatic email feature was included to encourage membership enrollment.

Barbara Wood, TACF's membership coordinator, discussed the membership renewal communication process, detailing the monthly renewal messages sent to members, with December being an exception. She highlighted challenges such as expired memberships and bad email addresses, which can confuse donors. Barbara conducted a successful lapsed-member campaign, offering incentives for renewal, and plans to implement an email campaign next year. She also provided a report on renewals sorted by chapter to keep everyone informed.

John Chastain, TACF's Director of Development, reported that the organization exceeded its end-of-year fundraising goal by $60,000, and he introduced TACF's upcoming one-day seed sale, 9:00 am on **March 18 (https://tacf.org/event/annual-wild-type-seed-sale)**. The decision to distribute seeds instead of seedlings was made to improve quality control and accessibility. The discussion included the complexities of seed delivery and membership policies, with a focus on ensuring clear communication and support for chapters in their seed sales. Catherine showcased a new resource on the website to facilitate coordination among chapters, addressing concerns about email display to protect against spam.

Note: In 2024, bareroot seedlings were $90/bundle of 10 from TACF's Meadowview Research Farm in VA. This year, TACF is selling nuts not seedlings. As a note, the WV chapter offers 3-month-old American chestnut seedlings free-of-charge to its members. Seedlings are not mailed, but need to be picked up at the West Virginia University greenhouse in Morgantown in mid-May. If you are interested in seedlings, and have not placed an order, you can request seedlings at: WVchapter@TACF.org. while seedlings last.

TACF's Legacy Tree Program

The American Chestnut Foundation's Legacy Tree Orchards, are used to breed the most current blight-resistant American chestnut trees.

How it works:

- TACF breeds American chestnut trees with Chinese chestnut ancestry to confer blight resistance.
- Each generation of trees is inoculated with the blight fungus, and only the most resistant trees are used to breed the next generation.
- This process is repeated over multiple generations.
- The goal is to produce a blight-resistant American chestnut tree that no longer has Chinese characteristics.

Where they are located:

- TACF chapters in Maine, Massachusetts/Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Maryland have planted seed orchards.

- The West Virginia Chapter of TACF has planted hybrid chestnut trees at 68 sites in 26 counties.

A Legacy donor receives 22 advanced backcross nuts annually for a donation of $10,000. The WV chapter has four legacy trees, more than any of the other 16 state chapters. The 88 advanced backcross nuts were mailed from the Meadowview Research Farm on 26 Feb. Those nuts were potted at the WVU greenhouse, and the resulting seedlings will be distributed to those members who submitted requests last fall. No additional backcross seedlings are available in 2025.

Not all 16 state chapter receive backcross nuts. The distribution from Meadowview was as follows:

State Chapter	Number of Nuts
Connecticut	22
Georgia	22
Indiana	12
Kentucky	54
Mass/Rhode Island	58
Maryland	30
Maine	28
Ohio	32
Virginia	42
Vermont/New Hampshire	14
West Virginia	88

Resignation of Dr. Will Pitt

Dear Chapters Committee members:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I write to inform you that **Dr. Will Pitt**, President & CEO of our organization, resigned his position effective February 14.

In the past year and a half, Dr. Pitt has been instrumental in guiding the organization through a challenging transitional period, leading TACF's decision to withdraw from the Darling 58 breeding program while strengthening ties between the organization's state chapters and national office. We are enormously grateful for his contributions and wish him well in his future endeavors.

As we begin the search for TACF's next leader, **Bruce Levine** has agreed to serve as interim CEO, after a unanimous vote from the Board. A member of TACF for nearly three decades, Bruce has been an instrumental leader in the Maryland Chapter, longtime member of TACF's Board of Directors, and chair of our Chapters and Science & Technology committees. He has been researching chestnut blight fungus at the University of Maryland since retiring in 2016 from a 26-year career in diplomacy.

All of us at The American Chestnut Foundation extend our warmest congratulations to Bruce and best wishes to Will.

Warm Regards,
Elizabeth Kramer
Chair, Board of Directors
The American Chestnut Foundation

Potting Day in Morgantown

On 22 February 2025, a small group gathered at the WVU greenhouse in Morgantown to pot about 1,000 wild-type American chestnuts. As stated on Page 3 of this newsletter, the WV chapter pays for the pots, stands and potting soil and provides seedlings free of charge to WV chapter members. In September 2024, **Mark and Mindy Double** (Monongalia County) and **Brian Smith** (Tyler County) harvested chestnuts from about a dozen American chestnut trees at the former Clements Tree Nursery in Mason County. Of the approximately 200 trees, only a dozen or so actually have burs on an annual basis. Some trees have abundant burs while others produce only a few. The trees at the Clements nursery differ in their response to chestnut blight cankers. While all trees are infected, some exhibit heavily callused cankers. Thus, it appears that the trees differ in their resistance to the chestnut blight cankers. Burs from trees are collected separately and noted by either tree number or their position by row in the orchard. The burs were collected in buckets or boxes and labeled by tree. The burs are allowed to dry for 1-2 weeks at which time leather gloves are used to open burs individually and the nuts are collected. After nuts from each tree are collected, they are soaked in a 10% Clorox solution. Nuts that float are discarded, and the nuts that sink remain in the Clorox solution for 15 minutes, after which time they are dried on paper towels. After drying, nuts are bagged, by tree, in a mix of: 3 parts peat moss; 3 parts vermiculite; 3 parts perlite; and 1 part water. This mixture is slightly damp, not wet. The bags are then placed in a refrigerator at 32-38 degree Fahrenheit until late February at which time they are ready to be potted.

While the WV chapter pays for the deepots in which the nuts are potted, we appreciate the return of pots by those receiving seedlings. This cuts down our cost for ordering new pots. For the 2025 season, the WV chapter spent nearly $800 purchasing new pots and stands.

Beginning in mid-February, all pots are labeled with colored tape. Color-coding corresponds to the tree numbers from the Clements nursery. Pre-labeling pots makes it much easier when the nuts are potted in the greenhouse.

Pre-labeled pots in the WVU greenhouse in Morgantown

By mid-February, many of the chestnuts began to sprout in the refrigerator, completing the winter-long stratification period.

Chestnuts with emerging radicles in a zip-lock bag

Three chestnuts with emerging radicles.

Amy Metheny (left), husband, Rob Eckenrode and Linda Coyle (middle) work in the WVU greenhouse.

Some of the 2025 potting crew standing in front of 1,000 potted American chestnuts in Morgantown.

Why Does the WV Chapter Raise So Many Chestnut Seedlings?

For nearly a decade, the WV chapter has been fortunate to have the cooperation of the West Virginia University greenhouse to raise about 1,000 seedlings each year. Where do all of these seedlings go? There are several destinations.

- The WV chapter offers chestnut seedlings free of charge to chapter members. Members are asked to pick up their seedlings at the WVU greenhouse in Morgantown in May. Since these are containerized seedlings, they are not able to be shipped in the mail.
- Hundreds of American chestnut seedlings have been planted in state forests in WV.
- State and local parks often request seedlings.
- There are chestnut trees on federal forests in the state.
- Germplasm conservation orchards (GCOs) have been planted throughout the state. These orchards of pure American chestnuts range from a few trees to 100 trees. An ideal GCO consists of 10 trees from each of 10 mother trees for a total of 100 trees. The WV chapter has only one 100-tree GCO, at Burnsville Lake. This orchard is maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Why plant American chestnuts? All of the American chestnuts that are distributed across the state are susceptible to the chestnut blight fungus. These trees will become infected and die, but about half will sprout and those sprouts will eventually produce male and female flowers. The reason to plant American chestnuts is for those trees that sprout and flower; their female flowers can be hand-pollinated with pollen from the advanced TACF hybrids. When the time comes that we have flowering American chestnut trees, TACF will send pollen (probably on microscope slides) that we can use to hand-pollinate our WV American chestnut trees. Female flowers that are hand-pollinated will have to be bagged, labeled and nuts collected in the fall. Trees that have resulted from hand-pollination with pollen from advanced hybrids will be the first step toward restoration of the species.

Currently, TACF is breeding the best trees with the best trees. The hope is to produce trees that have >70% American ancestry and sufficient blight resistance to survive in the forest. As tree planters, we cannot get discouraged by American chestnut trees that die. The trees that do survive will be part of the restoration process, and by hand-pollinating trees and collecting the resulting nuts, we can begin producing trees that have American form, sufficient resistance to the chestnut blight fungus and adaptability to WV. Ours is a generations-long program, and chestnut trees that are planted today are part of the process that our grandchildren's grandchildren will benefit from.

WV Chapter Grant Program, 2025

Dr. Melissa Thomas-VanGundy, Program Coordinator

The WV Chapter of TACF received three proposals for the 2025 round of grant funding. Briefly, the grants are made to assist in active restoration projects in the state, support education and outreach about restoration of the American chestnut, or to support scholarly activities related to American chestnut. There is a short application form and guidelines and submissions are reviewed by an ad-hoc committee of chapter board members. This year we received three proposals which were reviewed by five members of an ad-hoc committee.

All three proposals included establishing new plantings of American or hybrid chestnut. Two involved private lands, with either historical use by the public or planned educational activities. One proposal included planting an early hybrid known for producing nuts in public areas in a three-county area to raise awareness of the ecological role of chestnuts. The sub-committee review of these proposals resulted in many questions for those leading these proposed projects, and we will work with them to either grant partial funding or propose alternative ideas and assistance in other ways, such as supplying hybrid chestnuts seedlings or nuts for plantings. Considering the questions raised this year, Melissa will lead an effort to further clarify the purpose and scope of the grant guidelines we provide to our members interested in developing a project for funding.

Proposed Development in Mason County

For a decade, American chestnut trees at the former state tree nursery in Mason County, the Clements Tree Nursery, have been the source of about 1,000 nuts annually. Nuts collected from the 200-tree orchard have been distributed across the State of WV.

The development of the area of the Clements nursery by the Fidelis Corporation was detailed in a May 2024

WV chapter newsletter. Press releases in early 2024 made it sound like ground-breaking was imminent for the proposed Artificial Intelligence Compay. Former WV Commerce Secretary, **James Bailey**, assured the WV chapter that the chestnut orchard would be protected despite the building. Throughout 2024, nothing happened at the nursery. The former hardwood tree beds were sown to soybeans and corn. For the sake of the chestnut orchard, it was hoped that the development had fallen through.
In a recent press release (below), the future of the orchard may be in jeopardy.

PARKERSBURG, W.Va. (WTAP) - Two companies will be working together on a major economic development project in Mason County. West Virginia Governor Patrick Morrisey announced today that companies Fidelis and Babcock and Wilcox are working together on the development of the BrightLoop facility at Fidelis' Mountaineer GigaSystem Site in Mason County, West Virginia.

The Brightloop facility will use West Virginia's coal, natural gas and biomass energy resources to provide power to the Mountaineer GigaSystem site. The GigaSystem Site is a planned 2300-acre Monarch AI Data Center System in Mason County.

The BrightLoop facility paired with the Mountaineer GigaSystem Site could bring over 3000 high paying technical, construction and installation jobs to the area over the next decade. According to the governor's office, pairing the Brightloop facility with the Mountaineer GigaSystem site was a collaborative effort between the governor and the West Virginia Departments of Commerce and Economic Development.

In March 2025, a voice-mail message was left with the office manager of current Commerce Commissioner, **Dr. Matthew Herridge**. As of this writing, his office has not responded. The hope is that the same agreement that was made with Commissioner Bailey will stand with Commissioner Herridge and keep the orchard in tact.

WV chapter member, Brian Smith, harvesting chestnuts at the Clements tree orchard.

Chestnuts to New Mexico

An odd request came from Albuquerque, New Mexico. **Joe Griffin** is a member of Tree New Mexico, and he has read about TACF and specifically the WV chapter. Joe indicated that he wants to see how well American chestnuts will grow in the high plains of New Mexico. We sent Joe six germinating American chestnuts, and he called to say that the seeds arrived in good condition, and they have already been planted. When asked about the need for protection from deer, Joe indicated that in Albuquerque, deer are not a problem.

For over 30 years Tree New Mexico (TNM) has been planting trees in the Land of Enchantment and educating the public on the value and necessity of healthy urban forests. We continue to be the premier private, non-profit tree planting organization in NM (and the nation); planting thousands of trees each year and building a high level of understanding and advocacy for the expansion and maintenance of urban forests.

Tree New Mexico was initially formed out of concern for the environment by local high school students on the premise that tree planting is an important and worthwhile national and community goal. Since our founding in 1990, our partners and volunteers have helped plant over 1,250,000 trees in communities throughout New Mexico

Spring Chapter Meeting New Location

The spring meeting of the WV Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation will be held:
When: Saturday, April 5
Time: 1:00 to 3:00 pm
Where: Mineral County Technical Center in Keyser, WV (981 Harley O Staggers Drive, Keyser).

There will be a brief business meeting for board members from 12:30 to 1:00 pm. Remote access will be available, and the information to do so will be sent by email before the meeting.

Directions to the Mineral County Technical Center: The Technical Center is between and behind the primary and middle schools across from McDonald's, just south of Keyser on US 220. At the light on US 220 just south of McDonald's, go east on Southern drive to the back of the school, then north on Water Street. The Technical Center is on the left and parking is available just past the entrance.

Update for New Members

The WV chapter was incorporated in 2010, as the last of the 16 state chapters of TACF. We currently have 160 members, many of which are not residents of WV. Our chapter has members who live in: Washington, DC; Virginia; Pennsylvania; Ohio; Maryland; California; Michigan; Florida; North and South Carolina; and, New Jersey.

The national office in Asheville, NC sends out membership reports monthly. We have members who have been a member of the WV chapter since its inception 15 years ago. Other members joined just this year, so the understanding of issues relative to TACF vary widely.

This brief section is to bring up-to-date the new members who may have less of an understanding of issues relative to the goal of restoration of an iconic tree.

What is the cause of chestnut blight?

A fungus, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, was accidentally introduced from Japan into the port of New York City in the late 1890s. Japanese and Chinese chestnut co-evolved with the fungus; therefore they have some resistance to the pathogen. American chestnut has no resistance. The fungus kills the vascular cambium of the tree, girdling the tree and killing everything distal to the infection. American and European chestnut did not evolve with the fungus and therefore they have no resistance. The fungus causes cankers on the tree and two microscopic spore types (sexual and asexual) spread the disease. Over the course of 50 years, 4 billion trees were killed, drastically changing the landscape of the eastern North American forests.

Canker on American chestnut

How is TACF working to accomplish species restoration?

TACF had its beginnings in Minnesota in 1983, testing the theory of **Dr. Charles Burnham** who theorized if there were only 2-3 genes in Chinese chestnut that were responsible for resistance, then a 'backcross' breeding program may be successful. In short, Dr. Burnham's breeding program was to pollinate female American chestnut flowers with Chinese pollen. The resulting nuts should be 50% American and 50% Chinese. Trees resulting from those nut were planted, allowed to grow and flower. Those first generation trees were then hand-pollinated with pollen from native American trees--hence the backcross. Generations of breeding have been conducted since 1983 at TACF's research farm in Meadowview, VA using the backcross method.

Female flower on an American chestnut

What is happening currently in WV?

The WV chapter, along with the other 15 state chapters are planting germplasm conservation orchards (GCOs). These are orchards of native American chestnut trees. While all of these trees will become infected and die, about half will sprout and produce flowers. We can pollinate trees in our GCOs with pollen from TACF's advanced hybrids to create trees that have sufficient resistance to the chestnut blight fungus, the form of American chestnut (straight and tall) and adaptability to WV.

Amy Metheny at a GCO in Preston County.

Establishing a 100-tree GCO in in Braxton County.