

TREE A MAINSTAY AT BUILDING SITE

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POST-STANDARD COLUMNIST



This is a story about a tree.

It's a copper beech and it grows in the yard in front of the former state armory at 1055 E. Genesee St.

The tree could have been there for a century, or more, according to which version we accept. One guess puts the age at much further back than that, planted about 1870. There's said to be a row of similar beech trees in Oakwood Cemetery.

This particular beech is of a European species (*fagus sylvatica*), planted for decorative purposes. *It has purple leaves.*

Chris Sandstrom, of Cayuga Tree Service, knows this one well. He says lots of copper beeches were planted in the Syracuse area in the early 1900s.

This copper beech is special in another way, too. It's the namesake of the new student apartment project going in behind it in the old armory.

Copper Beech Commons is scheduled to open next August.

Yes, developer Norman Swanson explains, it was named for the tree.

Norm's our own creator of hotels. He redid the former Temple Adath Yeshurun (most recently home of Salt City Playhouse) in the 600 block of South Crouse Avenue as Hotel Skyler. Before that project he converted the Medical Arts Building, across from Forman Park, into Parkview Hotel.

Norm's finest creation, so far, is the Genesee Grande Hotel and The Mayflower, next door, which sit directly across East Genesee Street from Copper Beech Commons.

Sandstrom regards himself as the custodian of this copper beech. He recently put small bottles of fertilizer around the tree's base, a treatment installed once a year. He's set up a protective zone around the tree with fencing to make sure nothing hurts the beech's root system. Chris got very upset when he found the tracks of a construction machine around the tree.

He also plans to aerate the soil around the tree with a special device.

The tree service was founded by his dad, Arthur Sandstrom, 37 years ago. Chris has been involved almost that

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Dick Blume / The Post-Standard

THE COPPER BEECH tree in the 1000 block of East Genesee Street, in Syracuse, stands at the site where the Copper Beech Commons is being built. The tree, which produces purple leaves, is believed to have been planted in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

Apartments Named for Tree

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long.

The beech was there when New York state built the National Guard Armory in 1940. Norm Swanson bought the abandoned property in 2004 for \$579,000. Before the armory went up, the lot held Onondaga Orphan Asylum, in the early 1900s, and later a Tigris Shrine Temple.

The Syracuse Industrial Development Agency has granted Copper Beech Commons a 100 percent exemption from an increase in tax assessments for eight years, with a partial exemption for an additional four years. Some 133 apartments for about 300 Syracuse University students are planned. The project is independent of the university.

Norm Swanson said some of the apartments would go in the existing brick-faced armory, the rest in a new structure being built in the rear and connected by a courtyard. He said the site will include a fitness center, coffee shop, grocery, yoga studio and small basketball court.

The complex will include two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments. Each tenant would pay rent based on using one bed in the apartment. The developer explained that system is found in student apartments across the country, including new Park Point apartments on Comstock Avenue, which now is fully rented.

I asked Norm Swanson what his



The Onondaga Historical Association

THE ONONDAGA Orphans Home was torn down to make room for the National Guard Armory in 1940.

next project would be. "I always have three or four lined up," he replied. "I can't tell you which one will be next."

Otto and Marvin

Marvin Levine called with an interesting story related to my recent column about SU's sports mascot, Otto, the Orange. Marvin is an avid Orange fan who said he recently gave up his season tickets he's had at the Carrier Dome for almost 50 years.

Marvin's 87 this year and had trouble climbing those stairs to his seat. He'll cheer on SU from home.

A while back, according to Marvin, he claims he got Otto's rig straightened out when the mascot came by and Marvin piped up, "Otto, you're out of uniform." The mascot was wearing brown pants!

At the next game, Marvin says Otto had on the blue pants he (she) wears today.

Another time, Marvin spotted an SU athletic official in the crowd and berated him for starting basketball games at 8 p.m. Shortly, they started at 7 p.m.

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