ARMENIA TREE PROJECT

400 W Cummings Park, Suite 3900

Woburn, MA 01801

Tel: (617) 926-TREE

Email: info@armeniatree.org

Web: www.armeniatree.org

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**ATP Keeps Up With Trees During Busy Summer Months**

By Ani Melkonian and Kristine Hovsepyan

KARIN, Armenia--For schoolchildren, summer is a time to lie on the grass and watch clouds float by. It is a time to be free of responsibilities and worries, and a time to slow down. For trees, on the other hand, it’s a whole different story. For even during the warmest summers our green friends are hard at work.

Tree planting happens mostly in spring and fall. So what goes on at ATP’s nurseries in the summer? “In the summer months, we are mostly occupied with tree care and maintenance,” explains Nursery Manager Samvel Ghandilyan. “We constantly clear our fields of weeds, we cultivate the soil and, of course, diligently water our trees. All that so nothing gets in the way of the trees during this intense period of growth.”

ATP’s Karin Nursery is like an incubator; everything that grows on the grounds looks young, tender and bright. “Our young trees to me are just like newborn babies, and are handled with the utmost care by our committed staff,” says ATP’s chief propagator Tigran Palazyan. “To keep up with the tree growth, ATP’s nursery staff works full-time in summer as well.”

Different parts of a tree grow during different times of the year. Typically, the foliage of the tree grows in the spring, next is the trunk (summer), followed by the roots (fall and winter). However, not all trees follow the same pattern. Young trees can grow at fast rates during the summer. The girth can expand by as much as three centimeters in just a few weeks, adding to the tree’s rings.

The strong summer sun is a crucial resource for trees. Trees they lock in more of the sun’s energy than any other organism on earth. For trees, trapping sunlight is a matter of life or death. However, sunlight is a double-edged sword for trees, explains Palazyan. Too much of it can cause the tree to go through stress, dryness and even death. That is why they need to be watered regularly and require extra maintenance to thwart trouble.

“It is important to keep trees hydrated in the summer. Besides our employees who do rounds every day, we also have drip irrigation systems to help control the amount of water we give to each plant. That way we don’t drown the tree and we don’t waste water either,” adds Ghandilyan.

Often visitors ask whether they can plant trees in the summer. The answer is yes, through containerized planting which ATP has been developing in recent years for visitors and special events. As long as the soil around the roots is intact when the plant is removed from its pot or container, then it can be transplanted. And of course the newly planted tree should be watered generously and must be kept moist, notes Ghandilyan. The container planting program was underwritten by a group of donors in California: Commerce Hotel and Casino, the George Tumanjan Trust, JHM Charitable Foundation, Haig Papaian, Suzanne Papaian and Jeanne Tumanjan.

In addition to tending trees, ATP has been hosting visits to the Karin Nursery under the banner of its “Get Rooted” theme this year. It has even become a popular alternative as a family destination in the outdoors. During the tour, Ghandilyan and Palazyan introduce the nursery with a walking tour and describe experiments happening with several plant varieties on the grounds. The next “Get Rooted” tours are scheduled for September 5, October 1 and October 21.

At the end of the tour, a seemingly frail young tree, a silver birch which stands out from the others with the support of three thin threads tied to the trunk, is kindly asking every visitor to stop and fix his or her gaze on it. It is the five millionth tree planted by ATP since its founding by Carolyn Mugar in 1994.

“This tree symbolizes our effort to combat desertification throughout Armenia. It also demonstrates the incredible power of a pinch of soil, a few drops of water, a shaft of sunlight, and the most powerful of all, the mind and will of human beings, to give momentum around the world to the idea of bringing trees back to their motherland,” concludes Ghandilyan.

Armenia Tree Project has planted more than five million trees since its inception in 1994. The NGO is the only major tree planting program in the country and in its 22 years has successfully established four nurseries, two environmental education centers and has greened community areas in every province of Armenia and Artsakh. In the process, the organization has provided employment for hundreds of people and provided vital resources to thousands of village residents. For more information, visit the website www.armeniatree.org.

**PHOTO CAPTIONS**

Executive Director Jeanmarie Papelian (right) and Nursery Manager Samvel Ghandilyan (left) hosted interns from the AYF-YOARF and forestry expert Chris Fox at the ATP nursery in Karin Village