



# TOWN OF DOUGLAS

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**For Immediate Release**

**April 23, 2019**

On Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 12:30 PM, the Town of Douglas will hold a ceremony at 29 Depot Street in recognition of Arbor Day and a very special memorial tree on the grounds of the Municipal Center.

For many years, a strikingly beautiful ornamental Japanese cherry tree has graced the lawn of the Municipal Center. The spreading branches and abundant pink flowers have been captured in many photographs by residents over the years. The tree's appeal is befitting its original intent, which was to serve as a living memorial to two Douglas teenagers, Arthur Blodgett and Gary Ziak, who were tragically killed in an automobile accident in Whitinsville in 1963. The Municipal Center served as Douglas High School at that time – classmates planted the tree to remember their friends.

Unfortunately, the cherry tree has been declining for several years, having been attacked by insects and damaged by storms. Last year, town officials asked Douglas Orchard and Farm, where Aaron and Nick Socrat operate a family business, if it would be possible to save some of the living wood of the cherry tree – called scion wood – by grafting it onto new root stock. The technique is used by arborists and orchardists to perpetuate attractive qualities of fruit and ornamental trees but also give them greater hardiness.

On Thursday, the Town, Douglas Orchard, and living relatives of Arthur Blodgett will plant the new root stock at the Municipal Center one day before Arbor Day, the national celebration of the value of trees to our communities. Over the next couple of years, Nick Socrat will graft living wood from the memorial tree onto the new stump, with the hope that it will grow successfully. If so, the Town will be able to remove the dying tree with less regret.

Town Administrator Matt Wojcik said, "We all hope this approach works so we can honor the intent of maintaining this cherry tree as a permanent remembrance to innocent lives lost. On behalf of the Town, I wish to extend gratitude to the Socrat family for making this project possible. Having the know-how to pull this off successfully with limited living tree material is key."

He continued, "Douglas has a long tradition of planting trees as memorials, and it was appropriate to acknowledge Arbor Day in this way this year. We're very happy that living siblings of Arthur Blodgett were invited here today and will see this tree saved in this way. It is also fitting that the tree live on given that Gary Ziak was an only child and his parents have been gone for years; we are reminded of how fragile family lines can be."

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