

## Dateline Douglas

# In Douglas, a classmates' memory will live on with the planting of a new cherry tree

By Barbara Van Reed

The massive Japanese Flowering Cherry Tree in front of the Douglas Municipal Center that's displayed a profusion of pink blossoms each spring since 1966 is colorless this year. It's dying, and so might the memory of why it was planted in the first place if it wasn't for Town Administrator Matt Wojcik's foresight, thinking there could be a way to graft the old tree's living wood.

The tree was donated and planted by the Douglas High

School Class of 1966 to serve as a living memorial to two 16-year-old Douglas teenagers, Arthur W. Blodgett and Gary S. Ziak, who were killed in 1963 when their car struck a tree on Douglas Road near Castle Hill Road in Whitinsville.

The Municipal Center served as Douglas High School at that time.

The magnificent 30-foot cherry tree had been declining for some time, damaged by storms and insects

and is now covered with "mushrooms."

Mr. Wojcik asked Douglas Orchard and Farm's Aaron and Nick Socrat if it would be possible to save some of the living wood of the tree by grafting it onto new root stock.

On Thursday, April 25, in recognition of Arbor Day (the 26th), a new, blooming Kwanzan Japanese Cherry was planted in an open space in the Municipal Center's front lawn.

Relatives and friends of Arthur Blodgett and town employees and officials watched as Nick Socrat and Arthur's family members picked up shovels to finish planting the new tree.

Over the next few years, Nick will graft wood from the memorial tree onto the newly-planted tree, and if successful, the old tree will be removed with its memory transplanted as well.



Arthur Blodgett's yearbook picture.



Douglas Town Administrator Matt Wojcik addresses Arthur Blodgett's family, friends, and municipal employees at the cherry tree re-dedication.



Posing with the new cherry tree are Arthur Blodgett's cousin Linda Nadeau, Mike and Donna (sister) Girouard, and brother John. The old, dying cherry tree is in the background.

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."

Family of Arthur Blodgett at the re-dedication ceremony were his brother John, who now lives in Burrillville, Rhode Island, his sister

Donna Girouard and her husband Mike, who now live in Grafton, and cousins Linda Nadeau and Doro Towle, who still live in Douglas.

Also present was Fran Damore, president of the class of 1966. He explained that Arthur was a sophomore at the time of the accident, and Gary was a junior. Gary was an only child and his family has passed.

Fran's wife Eileen worked in the Douglas Town Clerk's office for many years. "I used to watch that tree grow every year, she said.

And that can now continue.