

[JMU](#) > [News](#) > [2026](#) > [April](#)

Growing the Madison Promise

President Jim announces plans to nearly double the acreage of Edith J. Carrier Arboretum

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President Jim Schmidt helps plant the first of many trees in the new arboretum development.

SUMMARY: In celebration of Arbor Day, President Jim plants a tree in the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and announces plans to nearly double the “living laboratory’s” acreage.

This article and other exclusive content is available in the [Madison app](#). 

One of the final events during [President James C. Schmidt's inauguration](#) week celebration invited guests to get outside and take part in an Arbor Day ceremony at the [Edith J. Carrier Arboretum](#).

The event, “Growing the Madison Promise Through the Arboretum Living Laboratory,” offered many exciting announcements, including plans to extend the arboretum’s physical and educational reach.

[Ali Sloop \('10\)](#), JMU stormwater coordinator, introduced the University Boulevard Reforestation Project, which includes plans to reforest and install natural green infrastructure along both sides of what will be the new University Boulevard and shared-use path. The final element of these efforts will be the installation of educational signage along the new path.





Edith J. Carrier Arboretum Director Katie Rankin delivers the welcome address at the tree-planting ceremony.

“In a nutshell, this will involve planting areas that are currently turf grass, or plan to be returned to turf grass, to forest conditions,” Sloop said. “After the meadow seeding, over 1,300 Virginia native trees will be planted into those meadow areas. Additionally, hundreds of native shrubs will be planted by students and volunteers throughout the reforestation areas to fill in the future undergrowth of the mature woods.”

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— Ali Sloop ('10), JMU stormwater coordinator

Molly O'Liddy from the Virginia Department of Forestry also recognized JMU's ninth year as a [Tree Campus USA](#) campus, a national recognition program that helps colleges and universities plant, nurture and celebrate trees.

Schmidt began his remarks with a reflection on his childhood, one that often found him outside and in the company of trees. This instilled in him a deep appreciation for the outdoors and a commitment to environmental stewardship that has been further reflected in his professional career. At his two previous schools, he led efforts to raise their campuses to Tree Campus USA standards.

JMU's newly announced [2030 strategic plan](#) stands on [five pillars](#) to guide university priorities for the next decade. The Madison Promise includes transforming the physical environment in service to education and the community, something the arboretum has been doing for almost half a century.

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Attendees gather with President Jim Schmidt behind the newly planted native white oak.

In pursuit of that promise, Schmidt announced that the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum would expand from 63 to 110 acres. “It will enlarge our living laboratory even more than originally imagined,” he said. “It will now encompass East Campus’ naturalized areas, offering more opportunities to observe and understand our vital relationship with the natural world.”

Sloop reflected on a Madison tradition, starting in 1911, in which the all-female sophomore and senior classes would host a tree planting in celebration of Arbor Day with the intent of leaving a symbol of their time on campus that would last for generations.



President Jim installs a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion.

“It was a big affair involving a procession of the entire class and faculty to the chosen tree-planting site. A talk was given on trees, a poem [was] shared, wishes for their class were written on paper and thrown into a hole around the tree,” Sloop shared.

Now, more than a century later, the tradition continues. With the help of Sloop, Arboretum Director [Katie Rankin](#), Arboretum Advisory Board member Charlie Wymer ('72) and student botany intern Mia Pretorius, Schmidt planted a native white oak, the first of many trees to be planted in the space.

“History reminds us that we’re all connected to our past and to this place,” Schmidt said. “It is the heritage that JMU has embraced in both the creation of this refuge and the values that drive our university still today.”

The event wrapped up with an open house at the Frances Plecker Education Center, where guests could enjoy a student-led naturalist tour or take a faculty-led mindfulness walk.

Photographs by Cody Troyer

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