



# TreesforLife

NEWSLETTER  
OF THE ARMENIA  
TREE PROJECT

ARMENIA **TREE** PROJECT ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԾԱՌԱՏՈՒՆԿ ԾՐԱԳԻՐ

Summer 2005

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## Welcome to all our new friends and loyal donors!

*Jeff Masarjian, Armenia Tree Project Executive Director*

**T**his year, Armenia Tree Project is embarking upon a new era of initiatives to strengthen our mission to reforest Armenia. With the generosity of our donors, including many new people who supported the Trees of Hope campaign, we hope to plant 90,000 trees—the most ever in one year—honoring the 90th anniversary of the Genocide. It is the first phase of our long-term goal to plant millions of trees, supported by exciting new programs in environmental education/advocacy, and community development.

We successfully concluded the pilot phase of our village-based backyard nursery program, and have expanded it to include 200 families this year. By providing a market for the purchase of up to 200,000 seedlings over the next two years, ATP is not only providing a desperately needed source of income for rural residents, but also securing their investment in restoring and protecting the surrounding forests. Growing and planting trees is always supported by broader community development activities and youth-based education initiatives.

In addition to such multi-pronged, comprehensive approaches to reforestation, we are also engaged in forest tree production through a more traditional large-scale nursery in Vanadzor. At our current nursery site, we have more than 300,000 trees growing.

As you will learn from the article on page three, our effort to seek support from non-Armenian sources is growing, which provides even more evidence that our work is vital. A new community fruit orchard was planted in Dprabak this spring with the help of a grant from the Weyerhaeuser Family Foundation. This is of particular interest because it is the first time we have successfully appealed to a non-Armenian organization that has invested so significantly in our work.

We will continue our efforts to seek support from partners with broad-based environmental interests, both in Armenia and abroad, in order to diversify and strengthen our funding base. At the same time, support from individual donors from all over the world remains the backbone of our program, and it is through your participation that we can continue working to revitalize Armenia.

On behalf of all the people whose lives are directly impacted by our work, I'd like to extend sincere thanks to all of our donors, and invite you to personally observe the results of your investment in Armenia's future.

## Trees of Hope Campaign Inspires Public Support

**I**n observance of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Armenia Tree Project has set an ambitious goal of planting 90,000 “Trees of Hope” across the Armenian homeland.

Since the launch of the Trees of Hope campaign in April, it has inspired Armenians throughout the Diaspora—from places such as Georgia and Arkansas—to locations with a large Armenian presence, including Armenia itself.

An Oklahoma woman married to an Armenian, for example, had never heard of ATP prior to the Trees of Hope outreach campaign and called to learn more. Students from one of the kindergarten classes at the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School in California responded with the idea to use the proceeds of their recycling program to adopt Trees of Hope in Armenia.

“These memorial trees are an inspiring way to honor our loved ones, and a practical way to preserve the precious Armenian homeland,” stated ATP Executive Director Jeff Masarjian. “With a thriving Armenian landscape by 2015, marking the 100th anniversary, it will be evident that the Armenian spirit is alive and well.”

The Trees of Hope initiative included print advertising, direct mail, satellite television and radio,

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Above: Executive Director Jeff Masarjian in April with a sweet cherry tree planted in the Aygut school orchard. Below: Jeff with the same fruit tree just one year earlier.

# 'TREES OF HOPE' CAMPAIGN Prompts Worldwide Effort to Honor the Past and Embrace the Future

continued from page 1

as well as promotion on Web sites such as Google and ArmeniaDiaspora.com. It also extended to broadcast media in Armenia to raise awareness of ATP and generate enthusiasm among local communities which stand to benefit from the effort both environmentally and economically.

A highlight of the campaign was the 60-second television and radio spot commissioned by ATP and produced in Armenia. The piece was created by world-class animators at Triada Studio and produced by Vem Media Arts, both located in Yerevan. The spots may be viewed on the ATP Web site at [www.armeniatree.org/hope](http://www.armeniatree.org/hope).

"By planting these memorial trees in Armenia—and through our other tree-planting initiatives—we hope that our efforts serve as an inspiration for other developing nations or recent survivors of genocide now in the process of healing and rebuilding," stated ATP founder Carolyn Mugar.

Rep. Frank Pallone of New Jersey, co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues and a longtime supporter of ATP who has participated in memorial tree plantings at the Tsitsernakaberd Genocide Memorial, noted that, "With the environmental degradation that severely afflicted most of the former Soviet countries, the Trees of Hope planted this year will not only serve as a strong reminder of the Genocide,



**Pictured in Aygut, where ATP has established backyard tree nurseries with local residents, ATP founder Carolyn Mugar urged Armenians everywhere to share in this expression of remembrance by planting Trees of Hope.**

but also help produce an environmental renaissance. I commend ATP for the important work it is doing."

During the peak period of media broadcasts in

North America and Armenia, ATP offices in Yerevan and Watertown were flooded with telephone inquiries and donations. In Armenia, people were calling around April 24, asking how they could contribute to the program, with both moral and financial support. Gifts were even sent by the Armenian Studies Program at the Ribet Academy College Preparatory School in California.

Simon Payaslian, Kaloosdian/Mugar Chair of Armenian Genocide Studies and Modern Armenian History at Clark University remarked, "Apart from strengthening the ecological integrity and contributing to the general economic prosperity of Armenia, planting trees across Armenia in memory of the 1.5 million victims of the Genocide bears powerful testimony to the persistence of memory and survival, to the transition from loss to revival.

"Trees of Hope clearly and in concrete terms indicates that the current generation of Armenians cares about the physical and spiritual well-being of the future generations," added Dr. Payaslian.

In the first month of the direct mail campaign, nearly 12,000 trees were adopted, and responses continue with tree adoptions, many made in the name of loved ones as gifts for Mother's Day and Father's Day, graduations, and weddings. To adopt Trees of Hope or learn more about this initiative, visit [www.armeniatree.org](http://www.armeniatree.org).

## A Winning Essay for Armenia Tree Project

Like all stories, this one has a beginning and middle; unlike other stories, however, this one will keep on going and growing, through the efforts of Armenia Tree Project.

Sixth grade students in Rhode Island were invited to submit essays for a "Spirit of Giving" contest sponsored by the Rumford Women's Club, describing a charity to which they would like to donate \$150 if they were successful business owners.

Nicole Sadaniantz received second prize for her entry, designating Armenia Tree Project as her chosen charity. Nicole is in her eighth year of studies at the Mourad Armenian School of Sts. Vartanantz Apostolic Church, and is a sixth grade student at St. Mary Academy in East Providence.

The co-principals of the Mourad School were present with Nicole and her family at a reception, where they accepted a donation on behalf of ATP from the Rumford Women's Club.

Nicole was one of several students from the school and 200 others from Armenia and the US who participated in the Art Competition organized by ATP last year to celebrate its 10th anniversary. The contest was intended to raise awareness of deforestation in Armenia and to foster a new generation of environmental stewards.

Ten trees were planted in honor of Nicole's first place entry, "Ladybug," and her passion for the program began. In her essay, Nicole explains that trees provide oxygen, prevent floods, provide fruit, and are the homes of many living things.

"Armenia Tree Project uses money it receives to plant and take care of trees in Armenia," writes Nicole in her essay, which was also reprinted in the local newspaper. "Armenia has many areas that have changed from fertile land to barren wilderness, so every tree makes a difference."

"With \$150, Armenia Tree Project could plant 10 trees, which could make much more of a difference in the world than a purse or a



**(L to R) Mourad Armenian School co-principals Anahid Kibarian and Araxie Arzoomanian, Nicole Sadaniantz, and Rumford Women's Club President Roberta Schneider**

pretty necklace for myself," writes Nicole in her inspirational essay. "Even as a child, every little difference I make to better the world can encourage others to make even bigger differences."



Stepan Ovanessoff (left), administrator of the Mihran and Azniv Essefian Charitable Trust of London, reviewing the renovation of a water holding tank in the mountains high above Aygut with ATP Deputy Director Mher Sadoyan.

## ATP Outreach Attracts Funding and Support From Growing Range of Partners

Armenia Tree Project's focused outreach for support from a broader base of organizations and institutions—from the commercial, governmental, and environmental sectors, both in Armenia and abroad—has begun to yield impressive results.

With the help of a grant from the Weyerhaeuser Family Foundation, a new fruit orchard was planted in Dprabak this spring. As part of its expansion of work in villages throughout the Getik River Valley, ATP staff worked with teachers and members of a newly established environmental youth club to inaugurate a school orchard in the village.

Replicating the successful methodology used in Aygut in 2003, an orchard of 220 apple and pear trees was planted, and local residents and environmental club members were trained on tree care and irrigation methods. The Weyerhaeuser grant provides for the establishment of two additional school orchards this year in neighboring villages.

Another example of a unique relationship is with the Embassy of Italy. Over the past three years, the Embassy and ATP have been successfully collaborating on the creation of "Italian Armenian Meeting Point Park" in the Malatia-Sebastia area of Yerevan. Since 2001, ATP has organized several tree plantings at this location sponsored by the Embassy, and more than 200 fruit and decorative trees have been planted at the site.

"Our goal is to build relationships and seek funding from organizations that believe in the mission of ATP," said ATP Executive Director Jeff Masarjian. "This gives us a chance to educate a wide variety of organizations on what we do, while we diversify and strengthen our funding base."

For the past five years, HSBC Bank in Armenia has sponsored the planting of hundreds of trees with

ATP at various sites in Armenia. "Our collaboration in greening Yerevan will continue with the tradition of our annual tree-plantings. Joining our forces we can improve the living conditions in these communities," said Nick Gilmour, CEO of HSBC Bank Armenia.

And with the support of the Mihran and Azniv Essefian Charitable Trust of London, the renovation of the water holding tanks has begun in Aygut, where ATP operates its backyard nursery reforestation program.

ATP has already coordinated the repair of the first reservoir, and work on the second holding tank will begin this year. The restoration of this essential infrastructure will allow families in Aygut to have access to a reliable source of water.

In celebration of a decade of activity in Armenia, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) sponsored a tree planting with ATP at Motherhood Park in Malatia-Sebastia. The humanitarian organization donated a total of 1,000 trees to the park, as part of an effort to foster community awareness of the need to restore green areas.

"UMCOR believes that improving the environment is something that will have a lasting effect on the families that live in Armenia, and we are honored to support such an important initiative in commemoration of our 10 years of service to Armenia," said Warren Harranty, head of UMCOR Armenia.

"There are numerous foundations and organizations around the world that may want to support organizations such as ATP," continued Masarjian. "Our outreach efforts include researching their interests and appealing to them as potential partners in our mission to revitalize the environment and improve the socio-economic situation in Armenia."

## Earth Day in Armenia

Karin village was the setting for Earth Day '05 festivities, where US Ambassador to Armenia John Evans joined honored guests in a ceremonial tree planting and reception hosted by ATP. The event marked the worldwide environmental celebration, and raised awareness of ecological and socio-economic issues in Armenia.

Among those in attendance were representatives from the UN World Food Program, Eurasia Foundation, Heifer International, UN Development Program, World Vision, Birds of Armenia, World Wildlife Fund, American University of Armenia, Urban Institute, and Sil Group.

In his welcoming speech, Ambassador Evans noted that this was the first tree he has planted on Armenian soil. The US diplomat also praised ATP for planting and rejuvenating more than 580,000 trees in Armenia since 1994.

Minister of Agriculture David Lokyan discussed resource management in Armenia. "This celebration of Earth Day stresses the importance of environmental issues by bringing public attention to present-day ecological problems," stated Mr. Lokyan. "The environment is what we leave to future generations," he declared.



(L to R) ATP Foundation President Susan Yacubian Klein, ATP Executive Director Jeff Masarjian, US Ambassador John Evans and his wife Donna, and USAID representative Katie McDonald at the Earth Day tree planting hosted at the ATP nursery in Karin village.

# Meeting the Challenge

## THE PROBLEM

Nationwide, Armenia suffers from ecocide as a result of unsustainable cutting practices. At the turn of the 20th century, an estimated 25 percent of Armenia was covered by trees. Today's estimate of tree coverage is as low as eight percent. According to the World Bank, 80 percent of Armenia is at risk of becoming desert.

The loss of forests in Armenia, brought about by a lack of alternate fuel sources, legal and illegal cutting and export of wood, and improper management of this renewable resource, is having a dramatic impact on the environment. The harsh reality is that all of Armenia's forests may be gone in as little as 20 years at the current rate of deforestation, leading to irreversible environmental damage and loss of a critical component of Armenia's infrastructure.

Forests perform important environmental and socioeconomic functions, but when they disappear inevitable and long-term consequences result, such as increased soil erosion, flooding, and landslides, drying of the local climate and loss of water supply, reduction of topsoil fertility causing lower crop yields, loss of plant and animal biodiversity, and severe air pollution due to lack of "natural air filters."

A primary cause of deforestation is poverty and unemployment. In urban centers such as Yerevan, residents desperate for fuel cut between 2–3 million trees during the energy shortages of the early 1990s, often leaving only the stumps remaining. These barren lots were once protective hillsides, circling urban areas as a vital barrier to pollution and dust. Once beautiful parks have now turned into ecological graveyards devoid of greenery.

## ATP's Inter-Related Goals and Objectives

As a result of our program expansion in the past several years, we have revisited our methodology and general operating framework, to ensure that all of our programs and objectives work hand in hand toward accomplishing our goals.

### Community Tree Planting and Rural/Mountainous Reforestation

At urban community sites, in villages, and in rural locations, ATP has made enormous strides in combating desertification by planting and restoring more than 580,000 trees, and hundreds of jobs have been created for Armenians in seasonal tree regeneration programs. Growing and planting an increasingly



Aygut backyard nursery owner **Sergey Banduryan** with fruit tree provided by ATP for his orchard.



**Hasmik and Gayaneh Mkrtyumyan**, environmental youth club members who help care for the Aygut school fruit orchard.

larger number of trees each year is the cornerstone of our reforestation efforts.

ATP's tree planting strategy has three components. First, producing trees on an increasingly larger scale at our state-of-the-art nurseries at Karin and Khachpar, at our reforestation nursery in Vanadzor, and in backyard reforestation nurseries in the rural Getik River Valley.

Second, planting these trees in partnership with residents of urban and rural communities at public sites, rural backyards, and areas targeted for mountainous reforestation. And third, coppicing, whereby the unproductive shoots that sprout from a stump are trimmed by teams of workers in order to grow a new, vital trunk.

Our targets for 2005 are to extend community tree planting activities to local villages where back-



Fruit trees are in bloom at Aygut school orchard.

yards and common areas will receive new trees, rejuvenate public areas including the Botanical Gardens and Komitas Park, and to reforest our first large tract of land in Aygut.

### Community Socio-Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

Poverty is one of the great enemies of forests. Historically, people with no other viable source of income or energy have destroyed the forests that were their lifelines, due to non-sustainable harvesting. Successful reforestation must be combined with locally based poverty reduction efforts in order to protect existing resources and investments in the future. In both urban and rural settings, poverty reduction and community development activities reduce the pressure on the remaining forests.

After assessing the severity of tree cutting and how it affected the vitality and sustainability of citizens in rural, impoverished areas, ATP laid out a strategy to reforest the Getik River Valley, an area located just north of Lake Sevan.

ATP initiated a pilot project that was designed to reforest degraded lands while generating income through micro-enterprise development in refugee villages. In 2004, ATP taught 17 families in the village of Aygut techniques for growing tree seedlings in backyard nursery plots.

With ATP's technical support these micro-enterprises produced 20,000 seedlings, and ATP paid

# OVERVIEW OF 2005 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

participants for each seedling transplanted into the forest. In 2005, we are expanding this project to include 200 families, who will be growing 200,000 trees. The development of these “micro-enterprise” nurseries not only provides for larger scale reforestation efforts, but also significantly increases each participant’s annual income.

While ATP’s primary focus is reforestation, we have also encouraged the involvement of other agencies in providing a broad range of services to the Getik Valley. Organizations including Heifer International, Project Harmony, World Vision, Armenian Eye Care Project, UNDP, USDA-MAP, Jinishian Family Foundation, and Weyerhaeuser Family Foundation are all involved in new projects.

This innovative program is still in its infancy. The ultimate goal is to revitalize the socioeconomic and ecological conditions of the 13 villages throughout the Getik Valley.

## Environmental Education and Advocacy

ATP is developing environmental education as a core program area in order to prepare the nation’s youth for becoming the next generation of environmental stewards. By actively engaging youth in a process to better under-

stand and appreciate the value of a healthy and sustainable environment, ATP seeks to protect the trees we plant today from future exploitation.

Because the public school system in Armenia does not teach environmental education as part of its normal curriculum, ATP designed a curriculum that will be introduced to teachers and students.

In addition, all of our reforestation work in rural villages—which is directly tied to social and economic development—has a key educational component focusing on youth.

The Michael and Virginia Ohanian Environmental Education Center at our nursery in Karin is a state-of-the-art facility in which students from secondary schools and colleges, as well as professionals in the field, attend trainings and seminars on trees and the environment.

Advocating for the development of a sustainable forest policy in Armenia and environmental laws that provide for natural resource protection is most effectively accomplished with a coalition of like-minded individuals and groups. ATP will continue to work in collaboration with partners to promote an environmental ethic in Armenia at all levels of society.

## Some of our 2005 objectives

- Plant **90,000 trees** all over Armenia, honoring the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide
- Produce **38,000 indigenous trees** of 53 different varieties in our nurseries in Karin and Khachpar, producing at least 50 percent fruit trees
- Produce **41,000 trees** in backyard nurseries in Aygut and neighboring villages, expanding the number of family participants from 17 to 200
- Produce **11,000 trees** ready for planting from Vanadzor nursery
- Expand **village revitalization** and poverty reduction programs to three new communities where we will begin by establishing community fruit orchards
- Organize **environmental youth groups** in these three villages
- **Rejuvenate 80 acres** of land at Botanical Gardens and Komitas Park through coppicing
- Prepare **environmental education curriculum** for implementation in public schools, while still providing training at Ohanian Education Center and in villages



Top left: Container planting and drip irrigation technology at ATP’s nursery in the refugee village of Karin.

ATP trees at Andranik Park in Yerevan.

Left: Pine trees growing in Vanadzor reforestation nursery.

# ATP Hosts First-Ever Environmental Education Conference in Armenia

## NEW CURRICULUM INITIATED BY ATP BEING FIELD-TESTED

**T**he first-ever Environmental Education Conference organized in Armenia, initiated and implemented by ATP and the US Peace Corps, was held this year at the ATP offices in Yerevan.

The objectives of the two-day conference were to build relationships between NGOs and Peace Corps volunteers working in environmental education, and to develop a strategy for sharing and implementing environmental education projects. The conference coordinators were Armen Tiraturyan, US Peace Corps Armenia Environmental Education Program Manager, Anahit Gharibyan, ATP Community Tree Planting Manager, and Karla M. Wesley, Environmental Education consultant.

Among many highlights of the conference was the unveiling of a new environmental education curriculum compiled by Dr. Wesley for ATP. The curriculum is currently being field-tested by the Peace Corps, and eventually will be presented to the Ministry of Education for implementation.

Attendees heard outstanding presentations by environmentalists and environmental education trainers from local and international organizations. Among the speakers were Peace Corps volunteers, ATP agriculture specialists, forestry experts from the Armenian Agricultural Academy, and educators from Birds of Armenia Project, Environmental Public Advocacy Center, and World Wildlife Fund.

In her welcoming speech, ATP Foundation President Susan Yacubian Klein stressed the importance of environmental education programs. "Ecology in Armenia is on a path of devastation," noted Ms. Klein.

"While at the turn of the 20th century forest cover in Armenia was estimated at 25 percent, in 1990 it decreased to 12 percent, and now, due to large-scale cutting, it is estimated that Armenia has only eight percent of forest cover left. There is great hope being generated at the conference to work together to combat current environmental problems more effectively," stated Ms. Klein.

A detailed presentation on forests and forestry management prepared by Hovik Sayadyan, head of the International Office of the Agricultural Academy and a lecturer in forestry and agro-ecology, covered deforestation in Armenia's regions and addressed present day forestry issues.

Karen Manvelyan of World Wildlife Fund offered an informative report on local biodiversity, from an overview of flora and fauna to a detailed



**ATP staff member Anahit Gharibyan teaches environmental lessons to children at the International School in Yerevan.**

**ATP agriculture specialist Genik Movsisyan (right) explains the methodology of grafting to Peace Corps volunteers during the Environmental Education Conference organized by ATP and the Peace Corps.**



study of rare animals inhabiting Armenia. "Many of these species are on the verge of disappearing, and this is a real danger we have to prevent," he cautioned. Dr. Manvelyan discussed the loss of habitat and biodiversity, the pollution of rivers and the atmosphere, and overgrazing as just a few examples of negative effects on the environment.

An overview of environmental legislation in Armenia was provided by Aida Iskoyan of the Environmental Public Advocacy Center with particular attention on environmental laws and enforcement. Dr. Iskoyan also discussed the international treaties and agreements signed by Armenia, and the

environmental education components of those agreements.

As part of its commitment to environmental education, ATP opened the Michael and Virginia Ohanian Environmental Education Center at its nursery in the village of Karin. ATP staff hosts students from the Agricultural Academy, Yerevan State University, and local schoolchildren on a weekly basis, teaching them about environmental issues. The nursery serves as a field laboratory where students learn techniques of tree care taught by invited experts and ATP specialists.



## ARMENIA TREE PROJECT

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### **Our Vision of Armenia**

A secure and independent Armenia with a tree-filled and healthy environment, flourishing economy, and vibrant society.

### **Our Mission in Armenia**

To advance Armenia's economic and social development by mobilizing resources to fund reforestation and community tree planting.

### **Our Pledge to Armenia**

We will use trees to improve the standard of living of Armenians and to protect the global environment. We will promote self-sufficiency, aiding those with fewest resources first.

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For every fallen victim,  
grow a Tree of Hope.

## The Hope Keeps Growing...

Armenia Tree Project wishes to thank the many individuals, families, groups, and institutions who so generously responded to our Trees of Hope campaign in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In turn, Armenia Tree Project will assume the responsibility of propagating, planting, and caretaking these memorial trees over the many years to come, bringing Beauty and Bounty to the Armenian landscape.