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DISCOVERIES

TEEN PLANTS FOREST

LIFE CONCORD, N.C.— Matthew Rich, 17, got a surprise phone call last year. The person on the line was Deano Orr, an executive with International Paper, the world's biggest paper and forest products company. Orr phoned to offer Rich 1,000 trees. "It was a pretty big deal," Rich told *Current Science*. "We were excited."

Orr had read an article about Rich in *The Charlotte Observer* describing the teen's plan to plant a forest in his hometown of Concord. Rich and a friend, Micah Stowers, came up with the plan after Rich watched workers clear-cut several hundred hectares of woodland for a subdivision near his home. Clear-cutting is the eradication of all trees from an area. "I didn't see why they couldn't keep some of the trees," said Rich. "It frustrated me."

Rich and Stowers decided to start a nonprofit tree-planting organization. To publicize the idea, Rich sent a letter to the *Observer*, which prompted the gardening columnist to write a feature about him. The feature caught the eye of Orr, who donated the trees. Many Concord residents and businesses also donated thousands of dollars. In addition, Rich applied for county and state grants, bringing the total amount of money raised to \$50,000.

The tree planting took place over a four-month period from December 2003 to March 2004. Hundreds of volunteers helped plant 1,300 trees—seedlings as well as mature trees—in a meadow in a public park in Concord. The trees were all angiospermous species, including oaks, persimmons, and dogwoods.



Matthew Rich, 17, spearheaded the planting of a new forest of 1,300 trees near his home in North Carolina. In September, he was one of 10 high-school students awarded a \$2,000 scholarship for outstanding contributions to their communities.

An angiospermous, or hardwood, tree is one that produces flowers.

For his work, Rich was awarded a Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes. The prize is a \$2,000 scholarship given to "outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet." Rich has put the money toward his tuition at Duke University, where he began studying ancient history in September.

Though he is now away at college, Rich hasn't forgotten the new forest back home. "It's thriving," he said. "Only a few of the seedlings, mostly dogwoods, haven't survived."

"The main point about this project is that something that started so small brought a community together," said Rich. "We were taken to heart by people in the state in a way I never thought was possible." ■

Fig. 1 Change Grows: The Charlotte Observer/Newsphoto