

Lake County Briefing

HIGHLAND PARK



Tribune photos by Jim Robinson

At Highland Park High School, junior Brent Markus (right), a landscape designer, pushes a pine into place with help from students Matt Arenson (from left), Jeff Davidson, Andrew Deyoe and Markus' brother Gavin.

Student sees his talents take root

While scores of Highland Park High School juniors spent their spring vacation in March investigating the universities they hope to attend in 2000, Brent Markus went on a different sort of mission.

The 17-year-old honor student and award-winning landscape designer flew to Portland, Ore., where he selected and ordered three truckloads of Japanese maples, dwarf conifers and other perennials from 15 nurseries.

"I chose these trees because no two have the same shape and all complement each other," Markus said. "And no matter the season, we'll always have color."

Twenty-five trees, including a 10-foot sculpted pine and 12-foot weeping white pine, were planted at the high school this month by student senate members as part of a beautification project that Markus designed and presented to the Parent Teacher Organization.

"It's rare that you find a 17-year-old with this much knowledge and skill," said Regina Manley, a counselor at the high school and student senate sponsor. "He's very well-read; I imagine one day he'll be famous."

But why go to Portland when nurseries abound in the Midwest?

"Portland has many varieties that aren't seen here," Markus explained. "Plus the prices are better out there."

The PTO allocated \$3,000 to fund the initial phase of the project at the school.

Additional trees will be planted after the renovations approved in District 140's referendum are complete.



School groundskeeper Elwood Butcher (left) and Brent Markus unload a decorative rock. Markus designed a beautification project for the school.

plete, said Linda Spies, PTO president.

Self-taught in the art of landscaping, Markus developed a passion for creating beautiful gardens after his parents encouraged him to redesign their half-acre property in Highland Park three years ago.

After extensive research, Markus selected most of the 300 varieties of dwarf conifers and Japanese maples that thrive there.

Along with the high school's trees and shrubs that traveled across the country, Markus bought dozens more for the homes of his private clients. One is Jean Meadows, who had not had her Highland Park property updated in 23 years.

trees and selected 20 that are just starting to bloom," she said. "He investigates and has a good, artistic eye. I am pleased with the results."

Results are what Markus achieves in the competition department too.

Besides winning the Chicago Tribune's Best Collector's Garden award in 1997, he took first place with the Gardeners of the North Shore Club in 1998 for the most beautiful garden.

Despite his achievements, Markus feels he still has a lot to learn.

"I'll probably go to Oxford University in England or St. Andrews in Scotland," he said. "They have beautiful gardens and great landscape-design programs."