Copper Beech Elementary School opened its doors 20 years ago and was named after the old Copper Beech tree that sat on its property for 100+ years. CB Elementary was built to serve the students of Glenside, PA, in Abington School District, an area where generations of families have attended Abington schools, and thus, many had a particular fondness of, or emotional attachment to, the Copper Beech tree and its long legacy in the neighborhood. For several years, however, the health of the Copper Beech tree continued to decline, despite the District’s and contracted arborists’ best efforts to try to save it. Administrators knew it was only a matter of time before they would have to make the heartbreaking decision to remove the tree before it became a hazard to passersby; with that decision would be the even more difficult task of informing the school’s students and the Glenside community as a whole. In the spring of 2021 when it was evident that new growth had not developed on the Copper Beech tree as the District’s contracted arborists had hoped, it was decided that the tree would be removed out of potential safety concerns.

**Research:** Gathering information about the tree’s long history, including recent preservation efforts were key. It included:
- Discovering the history of the tree through community members, longtime employees and historical archives. This also included background research to gain knowledge on the history of the school’s grounds, the naming process for the school, and other ways in which the District was connected to the tree—including significant events that impacted its health over time such as lightning strikes, fungal growth, pollution, etc.
- Identifying experts to provide insight on beech trees, non-native species of trees, tree preservation, and more, which involved looping in the local Shade Tree Commission for their professional insight, as well as our Township’s environmental center.
- Reviewing local and national media coverage about how other schools or towns have commemorated the life of a historical tree.
- Reaching out to schools in our area who have done tree plantings with community partners to ask for recommendations.

**Planning:** Initial planning began with key stakeholders including District and school-level administrators. Goals included:
- Delivering to the school and broader community the sad news of the tree needing to be removed.
- Educating students about the importance of tree preservation and upcycling to show the District’s commitment to maintaining its greenspaces.
- Warding off potential rumors and misinformation, specifically in regard to ensuring that people understood the extensive efforts that were undertaken to save the tree (and that it was not a decision that was made lightly).
- Identifying ways the students could properly celebrate the life of the tree and participate in the continuation of its legacy.
- Developing a thematic campaign that involved all stakeholders, including students, staff and the broader community.

**Implementation:**

- **Earth Day (Thursday, April 22, 2021)** – Announce the need to remove the tree and the campaign to celebrate its life, using the theme of “Celebrating Our Copper Beech ‘ElemenTree’”. This gave those who felt connected to the tree and its history time to stop and say goodbye.
- **Tree Removal Day (Wednesday, April 28, 2021)** – For logistical and safety reasons, the tree, which was located adjacent to the bus loop, had to be removed on a day when students were not in school. As Wednesdays were asynchronous remote instructional days, it was a fitting time to take the tree down and prep the ground for planting a new tree.
- **Arbor Day (Friday, April 30, 2021)** – Kicking off a week-long Arbor Day / Copper Beech ElemenTree celebration with students with:
  - **Virtual Assembly** - Representatives from local nonprofit, Briar Bush Nature Center, provided an educational component about the lifespan of a tree; conservation/preservation; the European Copper Beech tree species; and how we can repurpose wood to give it new life (“upcycling”).
  - **Design Contest** - To stress the importance of upcycling, at the end of the assembly, the school’s art teacher announced an art contest inviting students to design ways the school could repurpose the old beechwood. The teacher shared ideas like benches, bookshelves, sculptures, etc., and explained that the winning students would get to see their designs brought to life.
  - **Tree-themed educational activities** – Throughout the week following Arbor Day, other activities were tied-in, such as a reading display in the library with books about trees and songs about trees in music classes.

- **One week after Arbor Day (Friday, May 7, 2021)** – A new European Copper Beech Tree was planted in front of the school to provide shade to future generations of students, just like the old tree did. Two students from each grade level (K-6) were identified to assist in the tree planting. The CB principal and ASD Superintendent also joined the students, with the help of the District’s contracted tree service. Involved community members and staff members were personally invited to attend, including the Shade Tree Commission and PTO.

- **‘Love a Tree Day’ (celebrated on May 16, but observed at CB on Friday, May 21, 2021)** – Art teachers identified three semifinalists for the art contest, with the District superintendent and assistant superintendent weighing in on a final winner. The winners were announced via the school’s PA system by the principal. All three semifinalists received a prize. The top two winners will see their creations come to life as upcycled pieces.

- **Arbor Day 2022 (Friday, April 29, 2022)** – A woodworker is still developing the winning art pieces, but the plan is to reveal the creations on Arbor Day 2022 to the students/staff. There will be an additional social media push at that time, along with local media outreach.

**Evaluation:** The “Celebrating Our Copper Beech ElemenTree” was a huge success and concerns following the announcement were minimal. It ended up being a good news cycle versus a bad one as local outlets covered the tree planting, and included much of the campaign’s key messaging. Overwhelmingly, families and the community thanked the District for putting in efforts to not only save the tree all those years, but finding ways for students to honor its life. As a bonus, in a year where there were not a lot of big, exciting events due to COVID, this was a bright spot within the school community (students, teachers/staff) and on social media (for the broader community). The campaign is providing an ongoing boost in 2022 when the students will get to see their designs come to life when the sculpture is unveiled in the main lobby of the building. In addition, the newly planted Copper Beech tree now sits on the lawn of the school where it can grow for another century and be enjoyed by the community.
**SUPPORTING MATERIALS**

**Plan can be found here**

**Earth Day (Thursday, April 22, 2021)** – Announce the need to remove the tree and the campaign to celebrate its life, using the theme of “Celebrating Our Copper Beech ‘ElemenTree’”. This gave those who felt connected to the tree and its history time to stop and say goodbye.

- **News release** sent to local outlets and posted to the District website, accompanied by a several-year old photo of the tree when it was in a healthier state.
- Themed **banner** for social media, which was also printed and erected on the front lawn of the school to inform passersby of what was happening (in case they weren’t on our staff or parent email list)
- Corresponding announcement on all **District social media channels**
- **Letter from the school principal** to Copper Beech Elementary families
- **FAQ** with background on the tree, why its health declined, and how the District attempted to save it to address concerns head on
- Personally informing key stakeholders of the tree via **email/phone**, including parents/guardians who had inquired about its health and teachers/staff members who were present when the school opened its doors. For those who previously expressed interest in helping to save the tree, the District asked if they could help identify a woodworker who could assist the school in finding ways to repurpose the old tree wood.

**Tree Removal Day (Wednesday, April 28, 2021)** – For logistical and safety reasons, the tree, which was located adjacent to the bus loop, had to be removed on a day when students were not in school. As Wednesdays were asynchronous remote instructional days, it was a fitting time to take the tree down and prep the ground for planting a new tree. ([Example of social media post](#) commemorating the life of the tree as it was taken down)

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- **Attendees** - Two students from each grade level (K-6) were identified to assist in the tree planting; the CB principal and ASD Superintendent also joined the students, with the help of the District’s contracted tree service; involved community members and staff members were personally invited to attend, including the Shade Tree Commission and PTO
- **Event photos** - [Posted to social media](#) and shared with local print/online outlets

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- **First Place**: A cougar sculpture (the school’s mascot) that could be enjoyed on the school grounds or inside the building
- **Second Place**: Circular signs for classrooms around the building
- **Honorable Mention**: A bench for the school

**Arbor Day 2022 (Friday, April 29, 2022)** – A woodworker is still developing the sculpture and signs ([sketch here](#)), but the plan is to reveal the creations on Arbor Day 2022 to the students/staff. There will be an additional social media push at that time, along with local media outreach.