



NEWS

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**LT. GOVERNOR SANGUINETTI JOINS ILLINOIS TOLLWAY
AND THE MORTON ARBORETUM TO LAUNCH PARTNERSHIP ON ARBOR DAY**

Tollway Trees Initiative to plant 58,000 trees along Tollway system and conduct roadside tree research

DOWNERS GROVE – Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti today joined the Illinois Tollway and The Morton Arboretum to celebrate a unique partnership designed to plant 58,000 trees along highways and develop new knowledge through scientific research about tree planting and care in roadside conditions. Tollway plans also include native plantings and special “pollinator gardens” to support critical butterfly and bee populations along the Tollway system.

“Today, on Arbor Day, we announce this amazing partnership to beautify our roadways while expanding our natural habitats,” Sanguinetti said. “Governor Rauner and I congratulate the Illinois Tollway and The Morton Arboretum for taking this initiative and thinking outside the box to make our state even more beautiful and sustaining.”

To formally launch the partnership and celebrate Arbor Day, Sanguinetti assisted Tollway and Arboretum officials in planting ceremonial trees – two State Street® Miyabe maples (*Acer miyabei* ‘Morton’) – along the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355) at the Tollway headquarters in Downers Grove.

“We will be working with researchers at The Morton Arboretum to determine how we can create a greener, more natural environment by adding thousands of trees and plants along our 294-mile system,” said Illinois Tollway Board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom. “Along with constructing new roads and bridges, we want to dramatically increase the number of trees and amount of native landscaping next to our roadways to create a better driving experience for our customers while adding vital, sustainable new habitat for bees, butterflies and birds.”

The Arboretum’s research will take place at three distinct sites along the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355). The trees at the research sites will be evaluated to determine their tolerance to roadside environments where they are subjected to compacted soil, air pollution and other stressful conditions. Studies will inform future tree planting and care strategies along roadways throughout the region.

“The efforts of the Illinois Tollway are exemplary in helping to increase the tree canopy in the Chicago region, which needs more trees to improve the urban forest,” said Gerard T. Donnelly, PhD, President and CEO of The Morton Arboretum. “The partnership is an opportunity to utilize Arboretum expertise in tree science and conservation for planting trees in a transit corridor, and for studying trees in a real-world laboratory to produce practical knowledge for the public good.”

Through the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, which seeks to build a healthier and more diverse regional urban forest in a seven-county area, the research will serve as a resource for transportation corridor managers, counties and municipalities. The Illinois Tollway is a partner in the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, supporting its goals for tree and forest improvements to provide better environmental, economic and social benefits.

The Tollway has awarded contracts to plant 13,000 trees along I-355 and the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90) as it moves toward its goal of adding 58,000 trees.

Healthy forested areas along the Tollway help improve environmental conditions by stabilizing soils, filtering stormwater, absorbing pollutants and beautifying roadsides. Trees planted near roadways also can help lower air temperatures and reduce the “heat island effect” caused by the release of heat stored in pavement.

This initiative also will expand the diversity of tree species along the Tollway to ensure more trees survive if invasive pests or diseases emerge. Ash trees commonly were planted along roadways, but the emergence of the invasive emerald ash borer has resulted in the loss of an estimated 13 million ash trees in the Chicago area.

The Tollway also will develop a “pollinator garden” on Tollway property next to I-355 that will contain a variety of plants that provide food and habitat for birds, monarch butterflies, bees and other crucial insect species. Similar gardens also are expected to be added along other portions of the Tollway system.

The Tollway plans to continue its tree-planting program through 2020. The long-term research being carried out by the Arboretum will begin later this year.

Shrubs and other larger plants also will be added in some areas to create additional natural features and also to serve as snow fences and wind breaks that will help reduce the amount of snow blowing across open segments of roadways, particularly in rural areas. This work is anticipated to reduce snow plowing, salt use and maintenance costs on these segments, while also making it easier for the Tollway to keep roadways clear during the winter.

About The Morton Arboretum

The Morton Arboretum is an internationally recognized outdoor tree museum and tree research center located in Lisle, Illinois. As the champion of trees, the Arboretum is committed to scientifically-informed action, both locally and globally, and encouraging the planting and conservation of trees for a greener, healthier, more beautiful world. On 1,700 acres are 222,000 plant specimens representing 4,650 different kinds of plants, along with specialty gardens, educational exhibits, the award-winning Children’s Garden, 16 miles of hiking trails and the Visitor Center, featuring The Arboretum Store and the Ginkgo Restaurant and Café. The Morton Arboretum is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) charitable organization, welcoming 1.1 million visitors annually and serving 46,200 member households in 2017. Learn more at mortonarb.org.

About the Illinois Tollway

The Illinois Tollway is a user-fee system that receives no state or federal funds for maintenance and operations. The agency maintains and operates 294 miles of roadways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355), the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90), the Tri-State Tollway (I-94/I-294/I-80) and the Illinois Route 390 Tollway.