

## Ex-Army Corps commander undertakes tree planting project



*Beth & Ron Light hold some of the 2200 seedlings that will be planted on their Clark County farm near Waterloo, VA, Monday, April 20, 2015. Each tube in the background-called a tree shelter- will protect a seedling as it grows.*

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By VAL VAN METER - Associated Press - Sunday, April 26, 2015

WATERLOO, Va. (AP) - Ron Light, 56, is a patient man.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have planted a crop that won't be ready to harvest for perhaps 80 years.

On April 20, the first of 2,200 hardwood trees - walnut, maple, red oak, poplar - went into the ground around Light's home off John Mosby Highway (U.S. 50) near Waterloo.

"People will no doubt laugh," he said, looking out over part of his 24-acre homestead, because his "crop" won't be ready for cutting until his 2-year-old grandson passes his 80th birthday.

But, Light said, that's OK with him.

State forester Gerald Crowell noted that few people undertake to plant hardwoods because of the length of time it takes to get a return.

Oaks and walnuts that are taken out in a clear-cut must count on seeds left behind on the forest floor to regenerate the stand.

A lot cleared for a new house might get one or two trees to replace the many that are cut down.

Light is one of the few.

The former commander of the Middle East Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Winchester, Light retired in 2011 to enjoy his new Clarke County farmette with his wife, Beth, and three children.

And to do woodworking.

What began as a hobby in 1995 has turned into a business, as Light custom builds Shaker tables, rocking chairs, and full kitchen cabinet installations, among other projects.

The logs lying in front of his woodworking shop are a dead giveaway.

The projects he's undertaking these days are a far cry from the 600 projects, in 21 different countries, that he oversaw while heading the Corps of Engineers division.

But they also aren't as dangerous as some of the installations he put up in places like Baghdad.

In his new business, Lighthouse Woodworking, Light knows the value of American hardwood trees.

"There's a market worldwide for American hardwoods," he said. Much of the wood goes to Japan and China to make veneer, he added, while he works with solid hardwoods for the furniture and household items he builds by hand.

His future stand of hardwoods, which will encircle his home as the years go by, will be more valuable than softwood plantings of pine or fir, he added.

But, before that day, the trees will be benefiting Light and his neighbors in other ways.

"It's a huge carbon sink," said Light, who is an environmental engineer by training.

"Whether or not global warming is a fact, that's a good thing, to store up carbon."

The trees will also help with soil erosion and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.

That fact is appreciated by his wife, who trained as a biologist.

"I'm very excited about it," said Beth Light, who added she liked the variety of the planting.

In fact, Ron Light said, Crowell, who advised him on the plantings, "snuck in" some persimmon and dogwood to add to the food factor of the planting and bring in some flowering varieties.

But he's not complaining.

It's not good, he said, to have a monoculture.

His wife noted that those other varieties will provide spring color, while sugar maples will blaze around them in the fall.

The planting will cost about \$16,000 when everything is complete. Ron Light said state and federal programs are covering most of that, while he guarantees to maintain the stand for at least 15 years.

Looking back on his Army career, Light said he moved around the country and overseas for most of his life.

Now, he added, he's thrown out all the boxes he stored away everywhere else he lived in preparation for his next move.

"I'm done moving," he said.

Now, he can spend time in his wood shop, shaping new furniture, and glance out the window to see replacement trees slowly growing all around him.

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Information from: The Winchester Star, <http://www.winchesterstar.com>