



New Life

FOR VESTAVIA'S BRADFORD PEARS

WHEN THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ALDOT) DECIDED A FEW YEARS AGO TO CUT DOWN ALL THE BRADFORD PEAR TREES ALONG HIGHWAY 31, THERE WAS AN UPROAR IN VESTAVIA HILLS. For a city that treasures its natural beauty, losing the trees was painful. But few residents realize that while the pear trees no longer grace their roadways, the trees didn't go to waste. Thanks to the ingenuity and talent of some local woodworkers, the Bradford Pears still retain their beauty, in a different form.

"The State Department of Transportation thought the trees were dangerous for motorists on Highway 31," says Mayor Scotty McCallum of the decision to cut down the trees. "I disagreed with them. However, it was state property, and they had the right to make the decision. People were not happy. It was a pretty big controversy around here."

When members of the Alabama Wood Turners Association (AWTA) heard that the trees were to be removed, they contacted the contractor to ask if they could use the wood for club projects. "After we obtained the wood, the club members decided to have a Bradford Pear Challenge, where we had a competition to see who could craft the best work



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from the wood,” says Dave Chanslor, president of AWTA. “We had a first, second and third prize in the challenge, and everyone had a lot of fun.”

A wood turner works with wood to make it round by turning it on a lathe. With the Bradford Pear wood from Vestavia Hills, most AWTA members made wooden bowls or vases. “The most interesting, in my opinion, was the fellow who was making a bowl with his son helping him,” Chanslor says. “The bowl broke while they were working on it, and his son said the broken piece looked like a ship’s sail. So he made a sailboat from the broken bowl.”

In addition to AWTA, members of the Alabama Wood Workers Guild (AWWG) also obtained some of the wood from Vestavia Hills’ Bradford Pears. Both organizations are involved in charity work and training members in their craft.

For these experienced woodworkers, the Bradford Pear trees from Vestavia Hills were a joy to work with.

“Oh, it was a beautiful wood to turn,” Chanslor says. “These trees were so well maintained by the City of Vestavia Hills. There were no worms and no rot. The quality was excellent. And the wood from the Bradford Pear is especially nice to do a natural edge, where you leave some of the bark on it.”

As for Vestavia Hills, the Bradford Pears have been replaced with crepe myrtles and shrubbery that is deemed safer by ALDOT — and while the pear trees are missed, there’s some comfort in knowing their beauty was not wasted. “I think it’s so interesting and so wonderful that something positive came out of the cutting of the trees,” McCallum says.