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New Trail's Public Dedication Honors Local Business Giant

Fort Smith, AR — The Herman J. Udouj Memorial Trail, located on beautiful forested grounds being acquired by the Hardwood Tree Museum, will be dedicated to the public during a program this Saturday at 2pm, which will start with a ribbon-cutting by Mayor Sandy Sanders.

The trail was built as a lasting memorial to a man dedicated to local hardwoods and to Fort Smith. Herman Udouj started Riverside Furniture in 1946 with 40 employees. At its peak, the company consisted of 9 plants and 3700 employees. Although Herman passed away in 1998, Riverside is still in business importing furniture, and many of its employees past and present will be on hand for Saturday's dedication.

In fact, CEO Howard Spradlin and other employees of Riverside Furniture Corporation, along with Herman's nephew Dick Udouj and forester and Hardwood Tree Museum board member Bob Gillson, donated generously to make the memorial trail a reality. In addition, Gillson and local Boy Scout troop 4 helped clear non-native flora from the trail, and Furniture Manufacturing class teacher Mike Carmack and students from Northside High School built tree identification signs.

In addition to having a packed four foot wide surface, the trail will also include hardwood tree identification and exhibit and education areas. An ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) trail is also onsite to access these areas.

Saturday's 30-minute program will feature the ribbon-cutting ceremony, followed by short talks by Mayor Sanders, Bob Gillson, Dick Udouj, Howard Spradlin, and Herman's daughter Ellen Echols, who will speak a bit about her father's legacy.

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Event Location: South of the parking lot at the Janet Huckabee Arkansas River Valley Nature Center, 8300 Wells Lake Rd, Fort Smith, AR 72916

Additional Photos Available: More of the trail now and during its construction, and one of Herman J. Udouj.

About the Hardwood Tree Museum: Encouraged by a group of long-time residents of Fort Smith, including those in city government, the Fort Smith Museum of History, and the history department at the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith (UAFS), the Hardwood Tree Museum was formed as a tax exempt, non-profit public benefit corporation and organized in January 2009. Our work continues today — entirely with volunteers.

With assistance from the history department at UAFS, we are presently involved in a continuing effort of collecting exhibit artifacts, documents, and interviews. Using land donated by Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority, we plan to build our facility in a forest setting near the Janet Huckabee Arkansas River Valley Nature Center in Fort Smith. Our partnership with the Nature Center enables us to work on activities of mutual interest, including the identifying and marking of existing trees, planting additional species of hardwood trees and other native flora, landscaping, and developing outside exhibits