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April 21, 2004

Late reporter's 'Tree Walk' comes to life

By Ryan Clark
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James Walker had a vision.

Walker, then a 26-year-old Clarion-Ledger reporter, shared his idea with Donna Yowell of Madison in February 2003.

He wanted to start a memorial tree walk, one that would take viewers around the New Capitol, showing them different trees and the people they honored.

Walker's dream has become a reality.

The James Walker Tree Walk will kick off Jackson's Earth Day celebration with two 40-minute tours around the New Capitol at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. today.

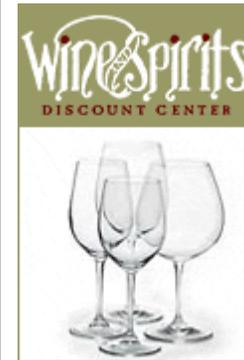
Walker was killed in October 2003 in a traffic accident in Copiah County while traveling to interview the family of a Mississippi soldier killed in the Iraq war.

Walker, a native of The Woodlands, Texas, had covered military affairs and the environment for the newspaper for two years.

If you go

What: James Walker Tree Walk.
When: Today, 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.
Where: State Capitol

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"He was a great supporter of trees and environmental history," said Yowell, executive director of the Mississippi Urban Forest Council. "He wanted to bring people from downtown — adults, which is who the walk is geared toward — and have them learn about why these trees are important."

Walker's wife, Kelyn Walker of Jackson, said she is overwhelmed by the honor.

"I'm amazed," she said. "I know that he would be really proud that the project came through ... that they developed his idea. The environment was one of his passions, and I'm very proud they attributed it to him."

Kelyn Walker said she did not know that the idea was originally her husband's, but she did say that he talked about it "all the time."

Yowell said the walk could be an annual event, depending on today's turnout.

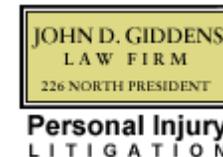
"It will be informal. People can ask questions," Yowell said.

Yowell said the event could hinge on the weather, which calls for a chance of isolated thunderstorms.

The walk will feature three specialists — a landscape architect, a forester and a historian — who will describe why 10 specific memorial trees in the surrounding area are important.

Yowell said another tour might be offered at 2 p.m. Thursday, which is Earth Day. Environmentalists from across the state will celebrate trees with a re-leafing in the Farish Street District, as well as music, art and nature events.

In the re-leafing, residents will be able to purchase trees for replanting in the Farish Street District or anywhere they please.





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