

Barb Trafton read this tribute on a misty morning in 2017 at Sakai Park where, as part of Earth Month -- Celebrating Trees, The Parks Foundation, in conjunction with the Park District, planned a tree planting.

The Bainbridge Island Parks Foundation is delighted today to honor Dr Olaf Ribeiro.

Internationally renowned and locally revered, Olaf is a Plant Pathologist, and lifelong student of trees. He can captivate you for an hour relating the benefits of trees.

I met Olaf years ago and several times he responded to my invitations for him to speak at the Student Conservation Corps. Brought his incredible resistograph tool that looks like an assault weapon but sends a drill into the core of a tree and provides a printout of cellular health that looks like an EKG.

Seattle Times has called him the Dr. Doolittle of Arboriculture

A few years ago, the Wall Street Journal wrote a long flattering article that made many islanders sit up and listen more carefully to the sage advice of this innovative scientist

Olaf can explain it far better than I can, but he has essentially developed a life-saving treatment for ailing trees by building healthy micro-flora in the soil surrounding tree roots, so that the trees can then access the nutrition they need to thrive.

All over Bainbridge, Olaf can point out the oldest, largest and most unique trees.

In Winslow, Olaf has led the charge to identify and monitor individual trees. He has treated elder trees in Winslow, and once got a call from a grateful woman whose father had brought the sycamore, red oak and elm in Winslow around the Cape from England's Kew Gardens.

On the Capitol campus in Olympia, Ribeiro treated magnificent Norway maple and a 200-year-old English oak, one of the oldest in the country, bringing both back to robust health.

He has worked his near magic all over the world, including nursing the famous Doomsday Oak in Ashton Court in England -- a tree which is dated back to the Middle Ages.

And as if there isn't already lots to love about Olaf, here is a little fun trivia: Ribeiro was born and raised in Kenya, where his grandfather rode a zebra on his rounds as a physician and made the Guinness Book of World Records as the only man to ever truly tame one.

Bainbridge Island is fortunate to be a place of healthy trees. But as we know, development pressures are intense, we have all been shocked to see swaths of trees, or significant loners suddenly fall. We need to safeguard the trees we love. Olaf has educated and encouraged us to protect and appreciate our trees.

The Parks Foundation wants to express thanks for Olaf's good work and community leadership, encourage you to join Olaf on a Winslow walk later this month.

Today on BI, as we honor Olaf, and applaud his accomplishments and ongoing work in support of thriving trees, our Bainbridge Island Wood-wide web is surely humming with appreciation, and welcoming the new Redwood youngsters on the rock.

IslandWood's longtime educator, Christina Woolf, gave this speech at an event in 2019 called History's Heroes.

I am so honored to be here tonight to honor a very special islander. Dr. Ribeiro has been active in our community in meaningful ways that restore and protect our island's most vital natural resources. In my opinion, Dr. Ribeiro is a genuine example of Bainbridge Island's 'old guard.' These engaged citizens, like Olaf, stand watch as sentinels for our quality of life, and as advocates for systems-thinking which is the gateway towards ecological health for all.

Dr. Ribeiro was born in East Kenya and had an international career in plant pathology before he arrived on our island in August of 1981. His life-long passions as a plant pathologist and horticulturist are highly valued among islanders, and our city government as well. Dr. Ribeiro has been able to use his vast experience as a scientist, steward and educator to inform and rescue many heritage trees on our island.

We oft regard Dr. Ribeiro as Bainbridge Island's real-life Lorax. In this wildly popular Dr. Seuss children's story, the passionate creature called The Lorax "speaks for the trees." In all the years many of us have had the honor to know Dr. Ribeiro, or as we call him, Olaf, he certainly embodies the spirit of giving voice to the voiceless, much like the whiskered creature that rises from the stump to question and halt an act of deforestation.

Here on Bainbridge Island, we don't have any native Truffula trees, but we do have trees — and lots of them! Environmental, educational and cultural organizations such as IslandWood, the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, and Sustainable Bainbridge have for several years collaborated with Dr. Ribeiro on many community events. You might be familiar with Olaf's wildly popular Historic Tree Walks of Downtown Winslow, and I gather – a tree walk to Crystal Springs soon too? Olaf was instrumental in organizing our island's first-ever Earth Month Bainbridge Island, now an annual event, that serves as an umbrella for many non-profit organization's programs about Arbor Day and Earth Day.

Our island needs advocates and a citizenry that is informed and engaged in the protection of our natural resources. Dr. Ribeiro walks his own talk everyday as he collaborates with groups and individuals to think about intentional growth, lobbies City Hall for stronger protections for trees, plants saplings in our public parks, and like a mad-scientist, mixes up microbe-mycelial cocktails to save heritage trees in Downtown Winslow by healing their root systems. His generosity is bar-none. He gives from his heart, he's tenacious, and most importantly he loves Bainbridge Island.

Dr. Ribeiro is certainly one of History's Heroes. I'm also proud he is my mentor and my friend.

His expertise, generosity of spirit and humor inspire us every day.

Thank you, Olaf!