

>> GREATER TORONTO

> TREE OF THE WEEK

Silver maple made us country strong

Its shade and shelter gave family a place to bond, relax and have fun

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Tree of the Week showcases some of the biggest and most beautiful trees in the GTA, as compiled by Megan Ogilvie. Here, Steve Vella tells us about his family's beloved silver maple tree growing in their Etobicoke backyard. Last year, the 125-year-old maple was recognized as a heritage tree by Forests Ontario.

We bought our first home in the neighbourhood of Long Branch in south Etobicoke in 1994.

From the day we moved, we've been very happy that we decided to raise our family here, with its winding, tree-lined streets and houses with big backyards. As our family grew, we started to look for a larger home. Our search was limited because we wanted to stay in our neighbourhood, and while we went to many open houses, none seemed right for us.

During this time, there was one house we admired and we hoped it would come up for sale. Then, one day, on the way to our children's school, there it was: a for-sale sign stuck into the front lawn.

the house; I think she knew she had made a sale.

What helped to make the afternoon so memorable for my daughter and I, as well as influencing our desire to purchase the house, was the beautiful silver maple tree. It is a wonder.

Since the day we moved into our current home in 2002, we have had many wonderful afternoons in our backyard.

It has seen many kids' birthday parties and family functions. Some of the backyard is in full sun and some in shade from the trees; everyone can get what they like.

In the fall, we often see clusters, or roosts, of butterflies in our backyard. It is quite peaceful and beautiful to observe them floating around for the few weeks they are with us. Some of them even land on us.

I asked my daughter if she has a memory of our tree that I could share, and she talked about a hammock that we had for many years that hung from the silver maple's branches. Our girls and their friends would all climb up and swing in the hammock, shaded by the big tree's branches. Sometimes they would be very quiet and relaxed and sometimes they would be so excited and try to swing as high as they could. She has many good memories of these backyard days.

