



MANHATTAN—Fences and ivy trim East 62d Street's trees.

## Good Neighbors

**W**HAT a difference trees make. Good neighbors throughout New York City are finding this out.

All over the five boroughs, block associations are sprouting. These groups have one major concern: to improve their environment and one of their best ways is to plant trees.

Many of these programs are started by individuals who often are new homeowners on the block. In addition to planning renovation of their own brownstones, they are aware that the entire block often needs sprucing up.

Block associations are formed. To invite the participation of other property owners and tenants on the block, letters are sent out to make a plea for trees and to ask them to contribute dollars for planting them. Fringe benefits often include courtyard plantings in front of brownstones, little gardens around the base of trees, general street clean-up and better behaved neighborhoods.

Typical of this citizens' awareness is the improvement of West 103rd Street between Riverside Drive and Broadway. The block association was formed by four young mothers who got together and mailed out letters asking for funds.

Each city street tree costs from \$100 to \$125. The association's letter invited property owners and tenants to send whatever contributions they could. Deductions (tax deductible) were collected by the Salute to the Seasons Fund which is a private organization supported by the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation. The fund works with block associations which are improving their neighborhoods. It arranges for planting contracts and obtains city permits.

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The contract guarantees replacement of the tree within one year, if it fails to grow. After the first year, the city takes over tree maintenance.

"We collected \$1,201 for our block," said Mrs. George Keller, spearhead for the 103rd Street association. "There now are 10 London plane trees plus three that the city put in front of the Frederick Douglass Houses. It just shows what can be accomplished when ordinary people get together." The association is continuing to encourage more

trees and "greening up" the city block.

These associations are not only tree planters, they are also neighborhood improvers. The group on West 78th Street formed a committee to meet with the city authorities to help rid the block of derelicts and dope pushers. It also enlisted the block's children to act as wardens of the trees.

Even if a block is already tree-lined, neighborhood associations are still being formed to replace trees lost from drought and to brighten the block. Improvements often include street-side gardens of ivy, begonia or geraniums 'neath the shade trees where city-installed Belgian blocks once were. Metal loop fences, painted white, add decorative trim. Association funds pay for the private maintenance contract for these gardens. Such plantings can be seen on Beekman Place and on East 62nd and 61st Streets between First and Second Avenues.

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The Park Association of New York City is also vitally interested in neighborhood improvement, city parks and conservation. It presents awards to block improvement associations and encourages window box plantings and street trees. The association expects to launch a gift and memorial tree campaign in the near future.

The city has also presented Honor Citations to some of the block improvement associations. "But the pat on the back doesn't mean very much to us," said one Manhattan property owner, "when the city does an about face and raises our tax assessment for an improved neighborhood. It's discouraging and we hate to ask our friends to follow our lead."

The favorite tree for New York city's streets is the London plane. It grows fast and withstands city pollution. "But we don't want to saturate the streets with plane trees," said Arthur Murphy, architect in charge of planting and design for the city's Department of Parks. "Other trees we recommend are ginkgo, willow oak (near the shore), silver linden, upright maple and honey locust. The city has planted 12,000 trees in the past few years. The goal is 18,000 trees by 1969." —J.L.F.