

Operation Cool Shade

By Susan McGinley

Trees do more than just decorate your yard. They can actually help you save money. Studies show that proper shading of the home can reduce energy consumption by as much as 20 percent. In Tucson, the Pima County Cooperative Extension has joined with Trico Electric Cooperative to distribute shade trees at reduced prices to residents for energy conservation. The program, known as "Operation Cool Shade," began in 1997 when Trico Electric Cooperative and Pima County Extension began distributing shade trees in neighborhoods. A requirement of the program was that trees be planted in locations around the house to ensure maximum shading. The residents received training from Cooperative Extension on correct placement, planting and care of trees, according to John Begeman, urban horticulture agent.

The trees selected for distribution in the past have included desert willow, elderica pine, blue palo verde, mesquite and live oak. Trico customers are eligible to receive up to three five-gallon trees at about \$5 each.

Master Gardeners were trained to conduct sessions for program participants on the correct selection, placement, planting and care of shade trees. Four programs were conducted by the master gardener volunteers. In addition, master gardeners staffed a tree planting and care answer booth at the tree distribution day conducted by Trico Electric Cooperative's headquarters in Tucson. Trico employees conducted follow up inspections to ensure that trees were planted in the pre-determined locations and that the trees re-



John Begeman

Mesquite tree in Tucson neighborhood

mained in good health. Follow up information and assistance with tree care has been provided by the Pima County Cooperative Extension. As a result of Operation Cool Shade, a total of 7,698 shade trees have been distributed to 3,330 residential customer properties over the last five years. To date, the total projected savings for all Operation Cool Shade participants during the peak summer period of July, August and September alone has been \$376,916.

The program continued during the fall of 2002. According to Trico Electric officials, it is the most popular public service program offered by the electric cooperative. Each year the number of participants exceeds the capacity of the program, and the waiting list is growing. ☒

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