



THE RAMBLE
BEAUTY ON BROAD CREEK



The Ramble:
A Plan for Waterfront Redevelopment
in Laurel, Delaware



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NO.	DATE	REVISIONS	REMARKS
1	04/06/2014		Initial conceptual design for the entire Ramble including park connection, the Cottages at Laurel Mills, Governor's Park and Independence Plaza and the Village Green.
2	05/20/2017		Final conceptual design and site plan for the Village Green.
3			
4			
5			

WELCOME TO LAUREL



In a few short years, Laurel has taken several significant steps toward a promising future. The development of The Ramble waterfront redevelopment plan. Achieving a Downtown Development District (DDD) designation. The award of a \$500,000 Strong Neighborhoods Fund grant to help build and rehabilitate homes in Laurel's Old Town section. Plans to complete The Villas on Broad Creek with a DDD rebate. A new brand. A new comprehensive plan. Matching grants to plan and build elements of The Ramble. Community Transportation and Bond Bill funds for property acquisition.

Our mission is Laurel

The mission of the nonprofit Laurel Redevelopment Corporation is to enhance the quality of life in Laurel by obtaining, rehabilitating and revitalizing properties to foster economic development for the town.

Various reports are available here in their entirety: <https://www.laurelredevelopment.com/reports/>

- [The Ramble Redevelopment Proposal](#), University of Delaware, 2015
- [Phase One Environmental Assessment](#) for The Ramble, BrightFields Inc., 2015
- [Ramble Waterfront Environmental and Engineering Studies](#), ForeSite Associates, 2016
- [From Broad Creek to the Chesapeake: Guidance for Growth in Laurel that Protects Our Water Quality](#), University of Delaware and Cedar Creek Planning and Communications, 2016
- [Downtown Development District Plan](#), Cedar Creek Planning and Communications, 2016
- [A Nature and Heritage Tourism Plan for Laurel](#), Conservation Community Consultants, 2016
- [Reimagining Laurel 10-Year Comprehensive Plan](#), Cedar Creek Planning and Communications, 2018
- [Proposal to Joint Bond Bill Committee](#), Cedar Creek Planning & Communications, May 2018

DELAWARE'S CHAMPION BALD CYPRESS

The state's largest bald cypress, as recorded in the fourth edition of "Big Trees of Delaware" Guidebook to the First State's Largest Trees," published in 2012 by the Delaware Forest Service, lives on Delaware Avenue in Laurel, across from the Records Pond spillway.

Michael A. Valent, State Forester of Delaware, explains a tree's size is determined by its trunk circumference measured 4 1/2 feet above the ground, its average crown spread, and its height. Points from each measurement are then tallied for a total value.

Laurel's champion bald cypress measures 258 inches around its girth, has a crown spread of 75 feet and stands 91 feet tall. Trees earning second- and third-place, respectively, are a 94-foot tall bald cypress in Cupola Park, Millsboro, and a 115-footer at Tussum Pond near Laurel. Though taller, both runner-ups scored fewer total value points than the Laurel champ.

THE PATRIARCH

"It's quite a tree. The one I see is 100 years young," remembers State Sen. Robert L. Venables Sr., D-Laurel, of the centuries-old bald cypress he named The Patriarch. He discovered it—and other bald cypress—when he hiked along the James Branch deep into the dense woodlands off Del. 24 east of his native Laurel. There, massive bald cypress thrived in wetlands on a tributary that flowed

from Trap Pond to Laurel. Venables, now 81, called the private area "The Land of the Giants" and accessed it regularly by clearing an old

deer path with his son Blair. More than 20 years ago, he led state forestry officials there to observe a gnarly moss-encrusted oak tree. While they were there, Venables suggested they see The Patriarch. Impressed, the forestry officials returned to measure it at 127 feet tall with a crown spread of 62 feet and a circumference of 26 feet, 4 inches or 292 inches. The oaks were sprayed and saved and The Patriarch made the record book. The Patriarch no longer holds a title, because it was struck by lightning and most of its root mass is hollow.

Range

The native range of the bald cypress is from Texas east to Florida and north along the coast to the Mid-Atlantic area.

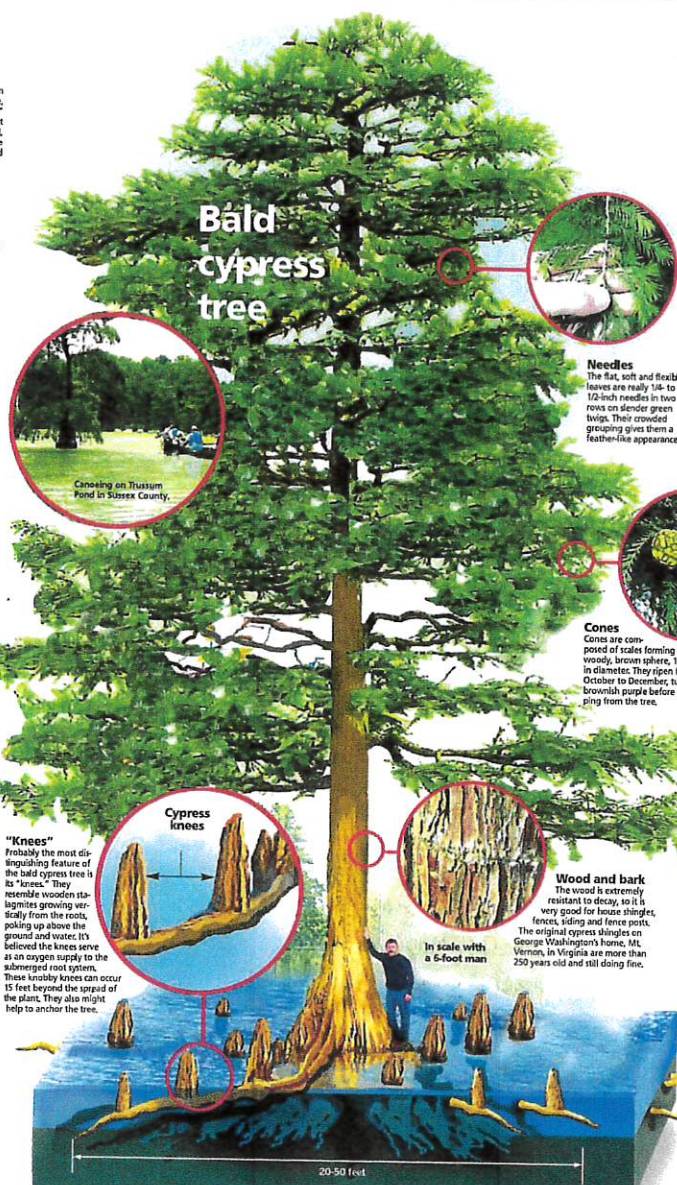
BALD CYPRESS USES

Bald cypress wood is pale brown, soft, durable and easily worked, making it ideally suited for both commercial and residential purposes. Somewhat waxy or greasy to the touch, it has a rather odd odor.

Uses have included such interior finishes of houses as doors and flooring, as well as shingles, fencing, railroad ties, barrel-making, boat-building and coffins.

As the heartwood is so long-lasting and durable in contact with either soil or the weather, it has been called "the wood eternal."

Indeed, the gates of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, which stood for 1,100 years, were constructed of cypress. And, since early times, branches or sprigs of cypress have been symbolic of mourning and, more recently, of immortality.

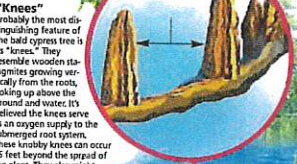


Bald cypress tree

Needles
The flat, soft and flexible leaves are really 1/2- to 1 1/2-inch needles in two rows on slender green twigs. Their crowded grouping gives them a feather-like appearance.

Cones
Cones are composed of scales forming a woody, brown sphere, 1-1/2 inch in diameter. They ripen from October to December, turning brownish purple before dropping from the tree.

Wood and bark
The wood is extremely resistant to decay, so it is very good for house shingles, fences, joists and fence posts. The original cypress shingles on George Washington's home, Mt. Vernon, in Virginia are more than 250 years old and still doing fine.



"Knees"
Probably the most distinguishing feature of the bald cypress tree is its "knees." They resemble wooden stigmata growing vertically from the roots, poking up above the ground and water. It's believed the knees serve as an oxygen supply to the submerged root system. These woody knees can occur 15 feet beyond the spread of the plant. They also might help to anchor the tree.



In scale with a 6-foot man



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With its knobby knees, drooping limbs and fluted torso, the bald cypress isn't exactly the sexiest tree in the swamp. Even its name is off-putting.

Regardless, it stands tall as the rock star of Delaware's freshwater wetlands in Sussex County, home of the northernmost natural stand of bald cypress in the country. And the bald cypress also rules as Delaware's only truly native deciduous conifer. That's tree talk for a cone-bearing tree that seasonally loses its leaves or needles.

"The bald cypress is unique for a couple of reasons," says Michael A. Valent, State Forester of Delaware. "And not only for its national spotlight in southern Delaware. People don't think of the bald cypress as a northern species. It grows in Florida and swamps in the South, 1,000 miles away."

Another reason, he says, is that "it does just as well on dry land. It doesn't have to be in water. Although it naturally occurs in bottomlands, it will do well in a front yard."

Valent adds there would be many more bald cypresses in Sussex County today had it not been for their significant harvest long ago. "The wood was very important for the shingle industry. Cypress shingles will last 20 to 30 years."

State Sen. Robert L. Venables Sr., D-Laurel, has fond memories of a certain bald cypress near his hometown. "I knew it was a big tree," he recalls of his first sighting as a young boy. The goliath tree was anchored in dense wetlands along the James Branch.

For decades, he commuted with that tree, naming it The Patriarch, and other bald cypress in his tranquil "Land of the Giant" and walked his dogs under their huge crowns. He introduced The Patriarch to state forestry officials who were so impressed they came back for measurements. Then it went in the record book.

"I thought it needed to be recognized," says Venables, who notes a lightning strike knocked The Patriarch off its perch as Delaware's largest bald cypress tree.

In addition to the many varieties of the cypresses in the Cupressaceae family other conifers include cedars, fir, hemlocks, junipers, kauri, larches, pines, redwoods, spruces and yews. Most are trees but some are shrubs and nearly all are evergreen, except the bald cypress and the larches which are deciduous, meaning each fall they shed their yellowish or brown flat leaves.

The bald cypress, which first appeared about 300 million years ago and is native to North America, Europe and Asia, frequently inhabits swamps and ponds and grows in an average height of 120 feet. Thousand-year old trees may reach a height of 150 feet. Bald cypress is a natural tree for estates and parks with low-lying grounds.

Its knees or knarled roots are perhaps its most distinctive feature and may protrude a few inches to five or six feet above a watery surface and help anchor the tree. The knees are covered with a thin bark, are hollow and usually die in the absence of water.

The tree's one-inch round cones or clusters of two or three cones develop on the twigs of the previous year's growth. The cones, which may yield up to 30 light brown, winged seeds apiece, provide food for ducks and squirrels.

"The bald cypress serves a very important ecological purpose," agrees Valent, who has seen the gentle plants by canoe in Trap Pond State Park's bald cypress swamp. "It's like traveling back in time."

ONLINE QUIZ AND INTERACTIVE GRAPHIC

Test how much you've learned about BALD CYPRESS TREES at delawareonline.com/didyouknow

You don't have to travel to Louisiana to find a Southern swamp. Sussex County is home to the northernmost swamp with **bald cypress trees** on the East Coast.

TREES WITH KNEES

BALD CYPRESS FACTS

- **Height:** Average 50-70 feet, can grow to more than 100 feet
- **Spread:** 25-35 feet
- **Trunk:** Wide, fluted trunk that narrows as it grows.
- **Fruit:** Seed cones.
- **Growing conditions:** Needs lots of sun, especially for early growth.
- **Leaves:** Deciduous branchlets with needles
- **Shape:** Smooth, even growth of leaves that resembles a rounded pyramid.
- **Roots:** Root system includes "knees" that pop up from the ground a few feet away from the trunk.
- **Fun Fact:** Bald cypress is the state tree of Louisiana.
- **Tallest:** Williamsburg, Va., 132 feet tall



VIEWING SPOTS



The Great Cypress Swamp

The Great Cypress Swamp is in southern Delaware and southeastern Maryland. The northernmost of U.S.'s southern swamps, it covers about 50 square miles. There are good entries into the swamp off Del. 54.

Trap Pond State Park

Another prime spot for viewing bald cypress trees. The park is off Del. 24. Spring kayaking among the bald cypress trees is a favorite pastime at the park.

THE "BALD" NAME

The bald cypress is so named due to its uncommon "baldness" (or bare looking branches) in a gymnosperm. It is the only member of its family that is native to North America. In fact, according to Yahoo!Encyclopedia.com, the redwood and the bald cypress are the only two trees native to this continent.

• COMING NEXT WEEK: As April nears, tulips blossom