

1-A - September 26, 1989  
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## Progress claims 200-year-old champion elm

By ERIC VREELAND  
News-Sentinel staff writer

The business of developing a gas station in the middle of a densely commercial West Knoxville strip became much more visible Monday when construction workers sawed down a 200-year-old tree.

The tree, an 85-foot-tall rock elm, was the state co-champion — tied with another leafy giant as the largest of its species in Tennessee.

Its destruction was fated months ago as part of a compromise to save the 149-year-old Baker-Peters House, 9000 Kingston Pike, and a 200-year-old maple adjacent to the elm.

By sawing down the elm, Phillips Petroleum Co. made room for a gas station and car wash development. In exchange, the maple and the house remain.

However, the benefits of trading one tree's life for another may soon be lost. The maple, with its 14-foot circumference, seems to be dying of an unknown disease.

"There is disease in the maple," said Jim Cortese, an arborist with Cortese Tree Specialists.

*"There is disease in the maple. The tree is being checked, and hopefully within two weeks we will know what kind of disease is in the tree."*

**Jim Cortese**

Arborist with Cortese Tree Specialists

"The tree is being checked, and hopefully within two weeks we will know what kind of disease is in the tree.

"I'm not real sure of its chances of survival. Even when we determine what disease we're working with, it will be real critical through next spring. The disease definitely has progressed this summer."

The tree that was cut down suffered from Dutch elm disease, Cortese said.

Phillips officials agreed to spare the house and develop a bit to the west — away from Peters Road and closer to Clearfield Drive — after hun-

dreds of Knoxvilleans joined a protest campaign.

Many picketed at the house and tied yellow ribbons around the maple.

A dentist, Larry Tragesser, eventually bought the house from Phillips. He has pledged to renovate the house and build additional office space on its southern end.

Historic preservationists have labeled the deal they negotiated with Phillips a victory.

After all, they argue, Phillips officials delayed their demolition plans, listened to community concerns and altered their site development plan to the point of taking a slightly less desirable location in the interest of good public relations.

Last May, Knoxville Heritage, a preservationist organization, honored both Phillips and the citizens' task force that helped work out the compromise development plan.

Cortese is sad to see either of the big trees on the Baker-Peters property lost, either to the saw or to disease.

However, he had nothing but praise for Phillips, which is footing the bill to save the existing maple.

"Phillips is committed to doing everything to give this tree a chance of survival," he said.

1-B



Workers cut down trees on the front lawn of the Baker-Peters House as part of a compromise plan to save the house and still allow Phillips Petroleum Co. to develop a gas station and car wash on adjoining property. Already felled was an 85-foot-tall rock elm, the state champion — tied with another leafy giant as the largest of its species in Tennessee.

Jack Kirkland/News-Sentinel staff