

## OLD WILSON TREE IN DANGER

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Guy Zimmerman, area forester, walks by a Southern Red Oak on the property of the old Wilson building in Cookeville. Construction at the building has threatened the life of the tree, which the Cookeville Tree Board says is around 200 years old. The tree board is trying to raise funds to prolong the tree's life. Herald-Citizen Photo/Ty Kernea

**COOKEVILLE** -- A tree that has experienced more than 200 years of local history is in danger, and a local club is trying to raise the necessary funds in order to prolong its life.

The Southern Red Oak tree that currently sits outside the old Wilson building in downtown has served as a witness to several historic events -- travelers checking into the Shanks Hotel, workers arriving at the former Wilson Sporting Goods plant and the lights blinking from the Cream City sign.

The tree has even survived at least two lightening strikes. It's said to be older than the city -- and the county -- itself.

But its life is now in danger.

Unavoidable construction at the old Wilson Building, which is being renovated and is now the home of a prehistoric dinosaur museum, has covered the roots with pavement, resulting in the removal of about 40 percent of the tree's root system.

Now the tree might not survive.

"Trees are like people, almost," said Guy Zimmerman, an area forester. "After time, your immune system runs down, and the same is true for trees. Because of the stress this tree is currently under, with its age and the construction, we have to pay careful attention.

"But with today's technology, we can prolong life of trees for quite some time."

The Cookeville Tree Board is trying to raise money -- as much as \$3,000 -- to extend the life of the tree. About \$875 is needed immediately for treatment that will help the stressed roots and slow its growth.

Crown pruning, which will improve the tree's appearance, and water, weather permitting, could sustain its life. The total bill for such maintenance could add up quick.

"If this tree could talk, it would be crying S.O.S.," Peggy Evans, chair of the tree board, wrote in an issued release. "Although times are tough, a little generosity from the people of Cookeville could save part of the town's history and beauty -- and help save an old friend."

Zimmerman said there are efforts currently underway to add the tree to the state's Historic Tree Register. Trees, especially those of this size and age, are important for a wide variety of reasons -- whether it be for providing shade, filtering the atmosphere of pollutants and providing clean water. The efforts of the tree board could add as many as 30 to 50 years to its life.

"To me, it is a very important historic landmark for Cookeville," Zimmerman said. "I'm sure there have

been people, years ago, who have opened up a picnic lunch and ate under the shade of that particular tree. It's probably been here before anything else and it's witnessed the development of Cookeville from its inception to today."

Donations can be sent to the Cookeville Tree Board, 390 S. Lowe, Suite A-231, Cookeville, TN 38501.

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