

CENTURY OAKS

UL Lafayette's Century Oaks aren't the largest live oaks on campus, but they are the most treasured of the *Quercus virginiana*.

On Jan. 1, 1901, Dr. Edwin Stephens, the university's first president, planted 18 young trees near the campus entrance. Ten remain, lining the corner of Johnston Street and University Avenue and shading the grounds of Girard Hall. (See map below.)

"At the turn of the 20th century, Johnston and University were dirt roads," said Jim Foret, a UL Lafayette instructor and licensed arborist. "Over time, horse-and-buggy traffic became car traffic but there were no curbs at the intersection. People would park their cars right up on the roots, compacting the soil.

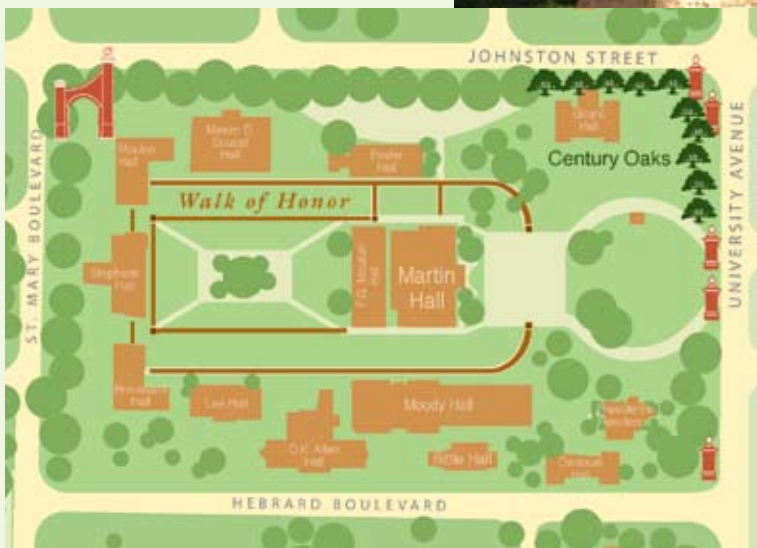
"Mature trees are especially vulnerable to root damage because they rely on an extensive root system."

The Century Oaks are receiving excellent care, said Mike Hess, UL Lafayette's grounds manager. "They are healthy. We're adding lots of mulch at the base of the trees to keep the roots cool and moist." The Century Oaks are among more than 250 live oaks on campus.

"In many ways, our trees are the ambassadors of our culture," said Hess. "By planting trees, Dr. Stephens was carrying out a vision. He was planning



TRAVIS GAUTHIER



UL Lafayette's Century Oaks are located near the North Gate.

for something he would never see but he wanted to establish a foundation. That's a tradition we're very proud of — and it shows in the beauty of the campus."

Stephens' commitment to promoting and preserving live oaks extends beyond the campus, said Hess. In 1934, he created the Live Oak Society, a registry of mature live oaks that now includes more than 6,000 trees throughout Louisiana. The society is managed by Louisiana Garden Club Federation Inc. Stephens' oaks were added to that list in 2001, when they reached the 100-year mark. ■