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Nature center trees treated by holistic healer

By SCOTT JASON - Staff Writer
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Independent scientist Lee Klinger looked more like a commercial painter than a tree doctor as he slathered a white coat of mineral mix on a black walnut tree.

"These trees have an immune system," he said. "They can fight off disease if they are healthy."

Sunday at the Chico Creek Nature Center, Klinger demonstrated a method he said can save trees from sudden oak death, which is caused by a fungus-like pathogen called *Phytophthora ramorum*. Trees can fight infection with their immune systems, but they are weakened by soil acidification, he said.

"Most of the trees dying in the Bay Area don't have the fungus," he said. "The problem is not the tree, it's the soil."

Klinger, who holds a doctorate in biogeography and has published articles in scholarly journals, improves the health of trees by painting their bases with a mixture of water, calcium, volcanic ash, sea salt and lime. It looks like milk when it is brushed on and dries white.

Klinger then sprinkles the ground with 44 pounds of soil sweetener. He uses Azomite, an organic powder made of minerals and naturally occurring elements. Rain brings the powder to the trees' roots.

Soil acidification is a natural process in the life of animals and trees, he said. Nature's way to deacidify soils is through burning. The ash, which contains alkaline, prevents acidification.

The process is based on what indigenous people all over the world have done in the past. For example, American Indians used to do controlled burns to improve soils. People near coasts used to put seashells or anything else containing minerals at the base of trees.

"Scientists never understood the utility, so it never got recommended," he said.

At the Nature Center, Klinger treated two incense cedars, two California walnuts and one black walnut, which is more than 100 years old and was scheduled to be cut down because it's dying. Some walnuts and cedars were not treated so people can compare the difference in spring.

The demonstration is so city officials can see alternatives for keeping trees healthy and growing. Klinger plans to come back to Chico early next year to give a presentation to the public about his methods.

City Councilor Andy Holcombe came to Sunday's demonstration to learn more about Klinger's process.

"It's a good thing to do to explore ways to protect the park," he said. "It's almost holistic nutrition health for trees."

Around 5,000 trees have been treated with the lime wash and they've had spectacular results, Klinger said. After treatment, only 12 trees died. Four died because the treatment was not early enough. The other eight died because they grew too many leaves in spring and the wind knocked them over.

After treatment, the trees bear better fruit and grow stronger.

Klinger said he is the only one who is encouraging lime washes as a way to keep trees from dying prematurely.

Rick Rogers, a coordinator for the Butte Institute of Noetic Sciences, helped bring Klinger to Chico.

"We're doing this for the city," he said. "You have to see it to believe it."

Rogers said Klinger's process has the potential to revolutionize the agricultural industry.

"It slows or arrests the aging process," Rogers said. "This would theoretically take out replacing trees."

The mixture Klinger uses is also used as a feed additive for animals. Klinger said he drinks a slurry of Azomite every morning.

"When we give this to plants and animals, they respond," he said. "It's improved my health."

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