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'Thank God I got trees.' prez says

Michael Rosen deals with trees.

Rosen is the president of Tree Canada, a non-profit organization founded in 1992.

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by Wyatt Danowski



Tree Canada president Michael Rosen thinks Canadians sometimes take our greenery for granted (Photo: Christopher King)

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Rosen is the president of Tree Canada, a non-profit organization founded in 1992.

Tree Canada is a voluntary organization based in Ottawa with 15 people working as community advisors across the country on upcoming projects.

"We were created to demonstrate to Canadians that they could fight climate change by planting trees," Rosen says.

One of Tree Canada's focuses is urban forestry projects. While over 80 per cent of Canadians live in urban communities, urban forestry only occupies 1 per cent of landmass in Canada, Rosen says.

"You have to make the urban area liveable with a forest because that is where people spend most of their time," Rosen says. "It is to protect people, to give them a sense of wellbeing, and to give them environmental benefits in the city where they live."

Rosen was born and raised in Toronto and attended Trent University, where he received a degree in history.

Rosen didn't grow up around national parks or provincial parks - just a little woodlot down the street. "That scenario is true with many people," he says.

During the summers, Rosen worked in logging camps in British Columbia. After Rosen graduated Trent, a professor in the university suggested that if he loved the outdoors he should pursue a career in forestry.

After graduating from Trent University, Rosen sold firewood for a year. He would cut trees from a woodlot in Peterborough and sell firewood in Toronto.

"My parents were worried," Rosen says of his job at the time, but he then went to the University of Toronto and received a degree in forestry.

The forestry faculty in the University of Toronto was the first of its kind in Canada, founded in 1907 by famous forestry scholar Bernf Fernow.

After graduating from the University of Toronto, Rosen worked for 18 years at the Ministry of Natural Resources for the Ontario government. He heard of an opening in the vice-president's role in Tree Canada and applied in 2002. Four years later, he became president.

"Thank God I got trees actually, because I am uptight enough as it is, so if I didn't have trees I would be seriously crazy," Rosen says with a laugh. "I also find landscapes without trees depressing, honestly, and I think in Canada sometimes we take for granted how many trees we really have."

Rosen is also a recipient of an Amethyst Award for his work during the Toronto ice storm of 1998. Rosen ran a program to help save as many trees as possible in the affected areas by not cutting the trees down and warding off the "unscrupulous arborists" or "Joe Chainsaws" who wanted to cut them down.

When Rosen is not in his office, he travels all over the world. In a month, he is travelling to Armenia to share ideas on how to improve their forestry program.

"Two Armenian foresters came here last April looking at forests and cities in the north, so I am going to Armenia for two weeks and going to observe and ask questions dealing with their moisture problem," Rosen says.

Tree Canada plants around 300,000 - 500,000 trees every year all across Canada and there are many projects that Rosen holds close to his heart.

"One of my favourite projects was the 75th anniversary of pensions in Canada, and we worked in hospitals and old age homes across Canada planting trees," he says. "There was research evidence that people who were able to look out in greenery heal better and faster."

Rosen says he loves working at Tree Canada because he cares for the people and the environment. "It feels good to help people," says Rosen.

"And that is where Tree Canada comes in."

Tree Canada has sponsors ranging from BC Hydro to the Foo Fighters. The Foo Fighters auction off their tickets to concerts in North America and give the money to Tree Canada so they can give it to other urban forestry groups.

Linkin Park and TELUS are also sponsors, the latter giving \$150,000 a year to this organization. Linkin Park donates one dollar for every ticket sold in Canada to Tree Canada.