DSU professor leaves her legacy in trees

By Eleanor La Prade

DOVER — Walking from the herbarium to the parking lot at Delaware State University, Dr. Susan Yost stopped to look at a northern catalpa tree.

“It was little,” she said proudly. “Only three feet tall when we planted it.”

She pointed to the long, thin fruit, “almost like cigars,” and the big, heart-shaped leaves.

The catalpa is one of the 172 labeled trees and shrubs that make up the Delaware State University Arboretum.

In August, the collection at the university’s main, 400-acre campus became the first accredited arboretum in Delaware — and also the only one at an historically black college or university.

The university’s collection of trees and shrubs was evaluated by the ArbNet accreditation program based on a lengthy list of standards, Dr. Yost said, including planning, support, public access, programming and conservation.

Thanks in part to her hard work, though, the application was quickly approved and the campus is now listed as accredited in the Morton Register of Arboreta.

“She won’t say it, but she was the driving force behind the arboretum,” said Lou Calabrese, a volunteer at the herbarium.

“She did a lot of the watering herself and she did a lot of the weeding herself, a lot of the planting herself. Student workers and volunteers helped out.”

From tree walk to arboretum

Dr. Yost, an educator at the university’s herbarium, can tell you a story about almost every tree on campus.

The pawpaw tree, growing just outside the herbarium, produces the largest edible fruit in North America — it almost tastes like mangos and has the consistency of custard.

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