

## For Immediate Release

### Massive Bench Is New Gathering Place At Hartford Public Library

**January 1, 2017** — A massive bench made from the largest elm tree in Connecticut is a new gathering place at Hartford Public Library. It sits on the main floor near the new books section of the Downtown location. It is a pleasant place to sit and read and will be used as a performance area in the library's new @thebench series.

The graceful bench is the work of City Bench, run by Ted and Zeb Esselstyne of Higganum. The brothers use trees that would otherwise be chipped, burned or dragged to landfills, and turn them into gallery-worthy utilitarian works of art. The seat of the bench came from a tree that was taken down in 2009 from Norm Coulter's family farm in Suffield. At the time it was the largest American elm in Connecticut, but it was starting to drop branches. The Esselstynes counted 148 growth rings in its trunk. The bench, made from one of the upper limbs of the elm, was fabricated in 2011 and installed in Terminal A at the Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks. It was loaned out for a six-month show at the Connecticut



Historical Society called "Lost Landscapes."

For the past year, the bench has been at the Golden Thread Gallery at the Copper Beach Institute in West Hartford, where it was part of the “Tree of Life Exhibition” in the fall of 2015.

It made its way to Hartford Public Library when Sara Bronin, architect, chair of Hartford’s Planning & Zoning Commission, and UConn professor of law, talked with the Esselstynes about their work at a Save the Sound event in November, and alerted HPL CEO Bridget Quinn-Carey, that the brothers were looking for a new home for their bench.

“We are thrilled to have this beautiful and historic work of art at the Downtown Library,” Quinn-Carey says. “ It is a piece of Connecticut history, and is a perfect spot for our visitors to reflect and connect with our collections, and with each other. Thank you to City Bench for making HPL the bench’s new home. We are excited to launch the @thebench program series.”

The bench measures 15 feet long and 4 feet wide, at its widest spot. Zeb Esselstyne says City Bench is making some large countertops from some of the remaining slabs they harvested from the tree.

“With its wine glass shape and ample shade, the American elm was the tree of choice for American cities and college campuses for generations until the introduction of Dutch elm disease in the 1930s,” Esselstyne says.

City Bench states its mission is “to create beautiful, sustainable furniture using salvaged urban trees; to establish a physical presence in a city which serves as a cultural and artistic hub and generates jobs for local craftspeople; and to build enduring partnerships within that city to maintain the vitality of the urban forest.” The Library will hold periodic demonstrations and talks in its new @thebench series. The first will be actor David Mills, who will present “Dare To Dream: The Words of Martin Luther King Jr.” at 2 pm, Wednesday, January 18. Events @thebench will be posted on the Library’s website.

#### **ABOUT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY**

As a finalist for the 2013 and 2014 National Medal from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Hartford Public Library has been recognized as national leader in redefining the urban public library in the 21st century as an innovative and stimulating place that provides free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration. In 2015-16, the 10 locations of the Hartford Public Library counted 850,000 visits, circulated 408,972

items and had 71,059 registered borrowers. We serve adults, children and families seeking early literacy opportunities, work skills training, civic engagement, arts enrichment, and so much more. Please visit [www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org).