Dolly Parton's ode to the American chestnut

Superstar Dolly Parton has recorded an ode to the decimated American chestnut, once the most important tree of the Appalachian forests, for the Asheville-based American Chestnut Foundation.

The tuneful "Oh, Chestnut Tree" is available as a free download on the foundation's website.

Parton, a native of eastern Tennessee, collaborated on the song with her uncle, Nashville singer-songwriter Bill Owens. Owens has been a member of the Chestnut Foundation for 25 years and helped arrange for hundreds of chestnut trees to be planted at Parton's Smoky Mountains theme park, Dollywood.

Chestnut trees provided mountain families rot-resistant lumber and a cash crop of nuts that fed people, livestock and wildlife through bitter winters. An Asian fungus accidentally imported more than a century ago spread rapidly through Eastern forests, killing four billion trees by 1950.

"The importance of the American chestnut to the Smoky Mountain region is hard to overstate, and its loss created considerable hardship," Owens says in a release about the song.

The Chestnut Foundation used a special breeding process that in 2005 produced the first blight-resistance trees. Its 16 state chapters are now planting "restoration chestnuts" throughout the East. As Parton sings, "Thank God for second chances."