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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO CELEBRATES ONE MILLIONTH TREE WITH
FORMER MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG, BETTE MIDLER, VOLUNTEERS, AND
COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Here we go. Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning!

Children: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio!

Mayor: There you go. There they are, leaders of the future over here. It's good to see you. Alright, Deborah, thank you – thank you for the poem, but especially thank you for all you do for this park and this community because part of why this initiative has worked so well is people all over the city who believed in it and took part in it, volunteered, and got involved. Let's give Deborah a big round of applause.

[Applause]

Mayor: Now I will be poetic in my own fashion and say for all of us, think about our lives, think about what we care about, you can literally identify a tree that means something to you in your life. It's part of the human experience. Maybe it's the tree on the corner where you grew up, maybe it's the tree that your children played hide-and-seek behind. In my personal case, it is a tree in Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, that I got married under. I love going back to that tree because it brings back that beautiful day in 1994. So, trees mean so much to us. They really pull at our hearts in a powerful way.

Today, we plant a tree that is special to all of us, to the entire city, a tree that marks the completion of a great vision, and the deepening and the continuation of that vision – vision that speaks to the health of our people and the beauty of our city. And that vision is Million Trees NYC and the visionary stands to my right in the stylish yellow sweater.

[Laughter]

The visionary – sorry, it's you.

[Laughter]

The visionary was Michael Bloomberg and I'm – we're here to give him a lot of credit for what he saw.

[Applause]

Now, I, in the interest of full disclosure, Mayor Bloomberg – today we are not planting the one-millionth tree – okay, that train left the station, the boat sailed, the tree – keep going with those analogies. That tree was planted

weeks ago very near here, but there was no reason to stop. So, today, eight years after tree number one was planted and two years ahead of schedule, proud to stand side-by-side with Mayor Bloomberg to plant – here we go – the 1,017,634th tree.

[Applause]

A lot of people have events celebrating that particular number, I know it's hackneyed but –

So, it's a proud day for you, Mayor Bloomberg. It's an important moment because it's a culmination of an initiative that sought to do something different that recognized that one of the ways we protected the health of our people is the most organic and natural way. It's something that means so much to millions of people.

And this vision, it was part of a larger interpretation of how we think about our urban environment and how we protect our health and how we protect our environment for the long haul, and that was rooted in the groundbreaking PlaNYC.

We are very proud in our administration to continue to shepherd that legacy and we are devoted to it. And before I go on and talk about some of what we'll be doing going forward as well, let me just take a couple of minutes to thank many, many people who deserve thanks who are part of this process or are here in support of this great moment.

But first, I want to begin at the beginning because the number-one beneficiaries are sitting before us, the students of from P.S. 35 the Franz Siegel School – let's thank them for being here.

[Applause]

I like the young man with the wave there – that's good, that's good. You have a future career in public service.

So, I wanted to thank members of Mayor Bloomberg's team who were so devoted to this mission and played such a crucial role in making Million Trees NYC a reality.

Of course, former First Deputy Mayor Patty Harris.

[Applause]

Arguably, Mayor Bloomberg's shyest deputy mayor, Howard Wolfson, who has also not been taught to use modern social media – he really should learn about it.

[Laughter]

I think – I don't think Adrian Benepe is here yet, or is he?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: He is – Adrian Benepe is here. Adrian Benepe, former Parks Commissioner.

[Laughter]

And Veronica White, former Parks Commissioner – we thank you all.

[Applause]

And we thank the elected officials who have joined here who are true believers in this effort. Congressman Jose Serrano.

[Applause]

Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

[Applause]

Chair of the City Council Parks Committee, Mark Levine.

[Laughter]

And you will be hearing from our Speaker in just a few moments as well, Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.

[Applause]

Now, Million Trees NYC was extraordinary. It was extraordinary for its ambition, it was extraordinary because it was a public-private partnership. It became, as with so many wonderful things in New York City, a model for cities all over the country and beyond. And it's achieved a fundamental goal and powerful goal – bringing trees to neighborhoods that need them the most, neighborhoods that never had the luxury of shady, tree-lined blocks, or tree-filled parks. Million Trees NYC is – recognizes that all New Yorkers deserve to benefit from trees in all neighborhoods. It makes the city more beautiful, cleaner, better for all.

Now, what I love about this initiative was it was focused and it was achieved through the grassroots – or should say the tree roots.

[Laughter]

Thank you – who writes this material?

Nearly, 50,000 volunteers – 50,000 volunteers participated and together, added to our urban forest by an extraordinary 20 percent. That is an amazing contribution to this city and we're not stopping.

You know, a lot of people could rest on their laurels and stop at the 1,017,634th tree, but no, we have continued and we will continue. And in that spirit, there will be 150,000 more trees planted over the next three years, to continue this great tradition.

[Applause]

And our trees want us to take care of them, don't they? So, with the help of the City Council, we've increased funding for tree care by 78 percent, spending more than \$15 million in this fiscal year alone. And we see this as a crucial part of a larger strategy to protect our urban environment.

Building upon the breakthrough PlaNYC, we've added to it with our OneNYC plan, our blueprint for a strong and just future.

Million Trees is a crucial element of this and it's one of the reasons that we intend to and we will achieve the goal of having the cleanest air of any big city in this country.

[Applause]

It's also absolutely consistent and complementary to our Community Parks Initiative. I want to thank Commissioner Silver for his great work, directing \$285 million dollars to communities in the greatest need of improved green spaces, transforming 67 local parks from Walton Park – Walton Park, excuse me, in Fordham Heights to Grandview Playground in Staten Island, making them into even greater community treasures.

So, while Million Trees NYC has been achieved, it only spurs us on to go farther and to reach every part of this city, to make sure that everyone has a greener and healthier and more sustainable future.

Just a quick few sentences in Español–

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to welcome forward the man of the hour. He has a lot to be proud of today. And, you know, Michael Bloomberg had an extraordinarily successful career in business, did a lot of great things for the city as mayor – now he is doing extraordinary work in his new stand-up comedy career as we saw at the Al Smith dinner.

[Laughter]

See, Mayor Bloomberg, your material was so outstanding at the Al Smith dinner, I just want to get your writer and work with them –

Michael Bloomberg: I'm not sure the governor thought that but –

[Laughter]

Mayor: As Mayor Bloomberg and I learned in this particular job, you really need a sense of humor to be Mayor of New York City. We welcome Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

[Laughter]

A big sense of humor.

[Applause]

Michael Bloomberg: Well, Bill, thank you. This podium seems a little taller than I remember it –

[Laughter]

– [inaudible] quite why. Anyways, Mayor de Blasio, thank you for that nice introduction and for inviting and lots of other people to this occasion. And thank you in particular for all the hard work that you and your administration has done to get us to the millionth tree and counting.

First, on a more serious note, let me say we were heartbroken to hear about the death of Police Officer Randolph Holder the night before this event was originally scheduled. He and his family remain in our thoughts, and we'll always be grateful for his selfless service to our city and to the people that live here. He devoted himself, as you all know, to making our city a better place, and that's the spirit that really brings us all here today.

This initiative was begun eight years ago, and it was an important one for our administration. And I appreciate Mayor de Blasio asking me to join all of you today.

I also want to thank the City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and her dedication to A Million Trees NYC throughout her years on the City Council, as well as Public Advocate Tish James for all her support of the initiative. And thanks also to Commissioner Silver and Deputy Mayor Liam Kavanagh for their stewardship of our parks here in the Bronx and across the five boroughs, and Council Member Mark Levine, chair of the Parks Committee, for all his work.

It is great to be back in the South Bronx. We planted tree number one eight years ago on Teller Avenue and 165th Street. That day, Bette Midler and I were joined by a junior high school chorus, some third-grade poets, and a Big Bird from Sesame Street. I would say it was the only press conference I ever co-hosted with a talking puppet, but the truth of the matter – I was – also appointed Miss Piggy as Family Ambassador for New York. She has not called me lately, for the record.

I also want to thank our borough president, Ruben Diaz Jr. – he and his father have been friends of mine for a very long time. And nothing happens in the Bronx without his input – and the Bronx, I think, is a lot better for what he has done for this borough. Back –

[Applause]

It's true.

Great to be back in the South Bronx, I said, but that day, when Bette Midler and I were joined by the Big Bird, I don't think either of us expected us to get here by now. Each new tree that we planted does make the city a little more beautiful, the air that we breathe a little cleaner, and our carbon footprint a little smaller. And when we multiply those little steps by one million, it really does make a very big difference.

We now have more than one million more trees in New York than we did 13 years ago – and that's something that all of us should not only take pride in, we're all going to benefit from it. Trees really do clean the air and improve our mental health – and improve real estate values – and they do an awful lot of things for wherever they're planted. And it really took somebody that had imagination, like Bette, to come up with the idea.

Million Trees NYC was part of a long-term sustainability strategy we announced back in 2007 to tackle climate change and to expand access to parks and green spaces for all New Yorkers. And these new trees helped us reduce our carbon footprint by something like 19 percent in just six years – and they really are one of the reasons New York air is cleaner than it's been in more than a century – or more than half-a-century, as Bill mentioned. They've made neighborhoods in every part of our city greener, and they've had an especially big impact in lower-income neighborhoods that suffer disproportionately from asthma.

And all of it would not have been possible without all the private individuals and organizations that supported this effort. And I was regaling somebody around the corner at a coffee shop before – the time that I was at a NYCHA housing project with David Rockefeller, who is now 100 years old – this was two or three years ago – he made an enormous donation to Million Trees, and he and I planted a tree, and we talked about when he was young, and what the city was like. And his first job – just as an aside – was being secretary to Fiorello La Guardia. And they didn't – hard to believe, but they didn't have tape recorders in those days, and so he walked around wherever he went and wrote down every single word so that –

Unknown: Wow.

Bloomberg: – there would be a –

[Laughter]

– but – and he – and he's really been an enormous help to this city.

City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito: I can't imagine that.

Bloomberg: It's a long time ago.

Bette and her team were with us then and on this project from beginning, and they've done a lot of good work over the years in parks and community gardens across the city. We couldn't have asked for a better partner. So thank you, Bette, and thank you, Deborah Martin, who's doing a great job as the organization's executive director.

Million Trees NYC is also a wonderful example of what's possible when government and public-spirited citizens come together.

Our original goal was to reach one million by 2017. And it really is because an extraordinary team of people that we rescheduled – reached that goal two years ahead of schedule. And that includes many city workers and volunteers from every walk of life – especially the Parks Department and their natural resources group, and for all their hard work; and all the people who donated to the Mayor's Fund; and all the community and school groups that came together to get their hands dirty, put shovels in the ground, and plant trees.

Who was the fashion model that I planted a tree with?

Unknown: [inaudible]

Bloomberg: I thought it was you.

Mayor: So many.

Unknown: So many.

Bloomberg: There was – there was one – the girl – the girl was taller than Bill.

[Laughter]

I was planting the bottom of the tree, she was holding the top of it.

[Laughter]

Anyways, we're helping make the [inaudible] greater city one tree at a time. And the best part is, as long as we take care to preserve their hard work, the results of this partnership will continue to grow and to blossom – good pun, oh – and for many years to come, for all our children and all their children to come.

I'm glad to say that it's work that my company is also committed to being part of, and many of our – the volunteers – the employees – our employees in New York City volunteer to plant trees and take care of trees through Million Trees NYC.

And this administration, as did ours, worked very hard to expand and strengthen our parks. And I know Bill is committed to continuing to do this. It really is something that we all, in elective office, have a chance to do for the future, for our young people, but also for all of us. It's great to go out and stand under a tree. It's great to breathe clean air. And without these trees, we would not be able to do it as well.

So let me thank, one more time, the people that really made this possible – Bill de Blasio and his administration, and the incredible Bette Midler.

[Applause]

She's always been very shy.

I'm going to kiss her, though, for all of you.

Audience: Aw.

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