GYPSY MOTH UPDATE

Root Crown Examinations

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CONTENTS

Features

4 GYPSY MOTH UPDATE
Expect an outbreak this year.

16 REVEALING EXAMINATIONS
Root crown exams uncover disease and hazards.

19 STAFFING YOUR BUSINESS
A business consultant offers advice on interviewing, hiring and retaining employees.

Departments

2 OUTLOOK

8 INDUSTRY INPUT

10 WASHINGTON IN REVIEW

12 MANAGEMENT EXCHANGE

22 INDUSTRY ALMANAC

23 CUTTING EDGE

26 CLASSIFIED

28 FROM THE FIELD

COVER PHOTO:
Selective defoliation of oaks and other species signalled last year's gypsy moth outbreak. Inset: Late instar caterpillars.
Volunteers really make this industry tick. They are the unsung heroes who give their time, energy and sometimes pay their own expenses to make this industry what it is.

For example, the ANSI Z133 Committee, which writes our safety standards, and the ANSI A300 Committee, which is writing industry consensus standards, are volunteers. So are NAA and ASCA officers and directors, the ISA International and Chapter officers and directors, the officers and directors of state and local arborist associations and members of their committees. They all give of themselves to get the job done.

They also take on financial burdens as part of their volunteer efforts. A few years ago, for instance, the 18 attendees at an NAA Safety Committee meeting tallied the cost of their airfare to the meeting and their total wages for the time they were away from their jobs. The total exceeded $14,000—a pretty expensive meeting and it didn’t even take into account lost sales or production.

While NAA, ISA, ASCA and others operate with paid staff, many accomplishments could not happen without volunteers.

No doubt these are the same people who volunteer for their church, their community, their service club, their school district and a variety of organizations.

They are also the people who are successful. While you might wonder how they can give so much of themselves and still do well at earning a living, the answer is quite simple: What goes around comes around. They make friends. They learn from their peers. They network. They broaden their horizons, develop new ideas and new strategies. When they go to meetings they know lots of people. The learning process becomes easier.

For most tree care company owners, it is very lonely at the top. It’s easy to say, “Go to a meeting and network.” It’s much easier when you are involved and the rewards are immeasurable.

Try it. Get involved. If you are a commercial arborist you belong in the National Arborist Association. All arborists should be members of the International Society of Arboriculture, ISA Chapters and state or local arborist associations. This is the mainstream of your industry. Once you become a member, get involved. Don’t try to operate in a vacuum. Your peers can make your life much easier and your peers aren’t necessarily limited to competitors. You will soon identify people with whom you can share your ideas and frustrations.

Don’t be afraid to volunteer. My hat is off to the people who belong and those who volunteer. They make the difference.

Robert Felix, Publisher
Two proven ways to control tree insects without harming the environment

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Inject-A-Cide® B

Stop pests that bore, chew or suck on plant tissues. Inject Mauget Inject-A-Cide® or Inject-A-Cide® B into a tree's vascular system and control more than 35 major insects that injure shade trees and ornamentals.

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Gypsy Moth Update

Be Prepared For Another Outbreak Year

By Peter Gerstenberger

This will be another outbreak year for gypsy moth in many parts of the insect’s expanding range. Areas in the leading edge of the insect outbreak—an arc that runs roughly from the Carolinas through the Upper Peninsula of Michigan—will likely be the hardest hit.

However, arborists in other areas should be on their guard. Recent research casts doubt on the theory that outbreaks emanate in a wave from high population centers. It is also doubtful that population explosions follow a set pattern.

Outbreak areas

Trees and tree owners along the leading edge of the insect’s population movement will feel the greatest effects for two reasons: Tree mortality is highest along the leading edge, and gypsy moth has fewer natural enemies in these areas. There will be isolated hot spots beyond and behind this front.

Outbreaks over large regions take place at the same time, dispelling the theory that outbreaks spring from “hot spots.” Low-level populations may go unnoticed for several years before conditions are right for an outbreak.


Life cycle

The first instar larvae hatch from eggs around the first of May. First instar larvae are tiny and might be unnoticed, except that they like to go ballooning. Larvae descend on a fine silken thread and prevailing winds may carry them 100 yards, even several miles. It is this dispersal that gives the gypsy moth its name.

Instars feed at night, but one of the characteristics of a severe outbreak is that larvae will feed night and day.

Male larvae go through five instars and females go through six before they pupate in July. Adults emerge in late July/early August.

The flightless female elicits a pheromone that can attract males from 100 yards away. After mating, the female will
look for a vertical object on which to de-
posit an egg mass. The size of the egg
mass varies with population density—in a
high density population, it may contain as
few as 100 eggs. The egg mass is the in-
sert's overwintering stage.

**Forecasting an outbreak**

In order for integrated pest management
practices and targeted pest control to be
effective, the arborist must be able either
to predict or detect a pest outbreak above a
threshold level. That threshold depends on
the level of aesthetic loss a client can
tolerate or physical damage plants can
endure.

How much is too much with gypsy
moth? The Massachusetts Department of
Environmental Management recommends
a simple sampling procedure that allows
an arborist or a property owner/manager
to determine if they should use control
measures.

First, pace off a 66-square-foot area
(one-tenth of an acre) of the landscape.
From the ground, count all viable gypsy
moth egg masses on tree trunks or other
vertical structures in the sample area. (A
viable egg mass is dark and firm.) Multi-
ply this number by 10. This gives you the
number of egg masses per acre.

The MDEM recommends an action
threshold of 250 egg masses/acre for resi-
dential areas and 500 egg masses/acre for
woodlots.

This simple formula makes a few as-
sumptions, namely that there are suitable
host trees in the sampled area, and that
clients and trees can tolerate some defoli-
ation. Use this technique and consider oth-
er variables before you decide to treat.

**Controlling the insect**

Several conventional pesticides and
biological controls provide adequate con-
trol of gypsy moth larvae, including
Sevin, NEEM oil, B.t. and Dimilin.

Natural predators such as the white-
footed mouse and parasitic wasps and flies
have only modest control on low-density
gypsy moth populations and are generally
ineffective against outbreak populations.

Several other non-chemical controls
look promising but are not yet commer-
cially available. Those receiving the most
attention are Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus
(NPV) and an insect-parasitic fungus, En-
tomophaga maimaiga.

In experiments, the NPV virus has been
effective when aerially applied on high
density populations. It may soon be pro-
duced in the private sector.

Dr. Joseph Elkinton, entomologist at the
University of Massachusetts at Amherst,
feels the Entomophaga fungus was largely
responsible for the decline in defolia-
tion in western Massachusetts, New York
and Connecticut in 1991. On the other
hand, absence of the fungus may have al-
lowed outbreaks to occur in New Hamp-
shire, Maine and Pennsylvania.

Identical to a Japanese strain of fungus
first experimentally introduced in 1911,
Entomophaga operates in low-density in-
sect populations. So far, it has been more
effective in rainy years when the fungus
can germinate more successfully. Elkinton
warns that Entomophaga is not a pan-
acea—outbreaks have occurred despite its
presence. This year, researchers will in-
troduce the fungus into new areas and

**Food Sources**

Are your clients' trees at risk in an outbreak? Gypsy moth larvae are usually selective about what
they eat as only certain food sources will keep a gypsy moth outbreak going. Gypsy moth caterpil-
ars can and will damage a pine if a better food source isn't available.

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Typical gypsy moth egg mass as it ap-
ppears in early spring.
continue to monitor areas in which it is established.

**The Asian gypsy moth**

Up to now, about the only features of a gypsy moth outbreak that worked in the arborist's favor were that the insects were slow-moving because the female was flightless, and that the pest was limited by its host range.

Enter the Asian gypsy moth. Thought to have been carried to this continent on Russian grain trawlers, the Asian gypsy moth first showed up in pheromone traps around Portland, Seattle and Vancouver in 1981. After disappearing for several years, it resurfaced in 1989 and 1990.

The adults, especially the males, are similar to their naturalized North American cousins in appearance. That is where the similarity ends.

The adult female can fly up to 25 miles, creating the threat of a quickly spreading outbreak. The last instar of the brightly colored larva can reach almost three inches, so it obviously has a healthy appetite. Finally, the Asian gypsy moth prefers conifers, an added threat in some areas.

On March 12, the Secretary of Agriculture declared a state of emergency to free $20 million in federal funds for combating the Asian gypsy moth invasion. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and U.S. Forest Service launched a major campaign to detect, contain and eradicate the insect in Oregon, California, Idaho and Washington.
Time is money in the tree care business, and the time you save with Versalift puts money in the bank.

Fewer set-ups, more worktime are just two reasons the VERSALIFT VO-50 is the choice of tree care professionals from coast to coast. It's been field proven to be an effective, hardworking, and dependable tool.

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To see a VO-50 on your work site, call or write today for more information and the name of your nearest VERSALIFT distributor.
A big disappointment
I was perplexed, angered and ultimately disappointed after reading the January 1992 Tree Care Industry.

On the positive side, the first four essays/articles dealt with the need for certification in order to, among other reasons, "place the tree care profession on a par with other professions." Robert Felix goes on to say, "It won't stop those pickup truck and chain saw operators that appear and disappear with great regularity."

Beginning with Felix's useful ideas on certification through (Mark) Herriot's and (William) Kruidenier's informative articles, I began to think to myself, "Hey, this organization really means it when they talk about professionalism. Way to go!"

Reading the article entitled "My First Take Down" instantly took the fizz out of my soda. Here we are introduced to an apparently uninsured, apparently uncertified, admittedly practically non-equipped undergraduate student violating practically every tenet of the code of ethics. And TCI paid him to tell his story.

Think about the person you're patting on the back by publishing such stories. Does the NAA hire second-year law students to represent itself? Would you hire a third-year medical student to diagnose and surgically treat your brain tumor? Of course not! Then why on earth are we publicizing and encouraging such escapades of Mr. Chenail, fine fellow though I'm sure he is.

Please, TCI, more consistency and less vacillation on professionalism.

Edward M. O'Connell

Letters should be addressed to:
Tree Care Industry, Editor
P.O. Box 1094
Amherst, NH 03031
"Just Push Play"

Why try and explain something that you can show in a video in less than 20 minutes?

Video programs from the National Arborist Association make it easier to train new employees and refresh the memories of experienced employees. All you have to do is select the subject and turn on the VCR. Order now and save 10% THIS MONTH'S FEATURE VIDEOS ARE:

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS & TREES AND AERIAL RESCUE

Electrical Hazards and Trees
Tree workers are near electrical hazards every day. This video reviews the proper tools, techniques and equipment necessary to work safely in proximity to such hazards.

Aerial Rescue
This video demonstrates the various procedures for carrying out an aerial rescue for a victim in a tree or bucket truck. What tools should be used? How can other crew members rescue a worker who is in contact with an energized tree or piece of equipment? What precautionary measures will prevent the rescuer from becoming a victim as well? These and other questions are answered, with demonstrations of various lifesaving techniques.

The above two videos and the accompanying "how-to" guide are also available in Spanish.
Ruling Opposed
States May Regain Power To Decide On Pesticide Use

By Brian Barnard
TCI Staff

In a major reversal of position, the Bush administration is now opposing the right of local governments to regulate how pesticides are used.

Victor J. Kimm, the Environmental Protection Agency's assistant administrator for Prevention, Pesticides and Toxic Substances, said states—not municipal governments—should have the power to govern use of toxic chemicals. Kimm's statement was made at a House Agriculture Subcommittee hearing on H.R. 3850, the Federal-State Pesticide Regulation Partnership Act.

H.R. 3850 was introduced last fall after the Supreme Court ruled that the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) did not prohibit communities from regulating pesticides. Through the efforts of the Coalition for Sensible Pesticide Policy (CSPP), representation of responsible regulation for the profession continues. The National Arborist Association is actively involved with the CSPP.

At the hearing Kimm said, "After weighing the competing policies, the Administration believes that a political subdivision of a state should be prohibited from regulating pesticide sale and use unless the state has acted affirmatively to allow local regulation; however, local regulations in effect as of January 1, 1992 would continue in effect unless a state acted affirmatively to preempt them." Further, Kimm asserted that the state "is the appropriate level" to ward off burdensome regulation by 83,000 local governments.

H.R. 3850 is similar to the Senate version, S. 2085. The administration's stand will encourage passage of these bills.

Win Cash
For Your Photo
Take a shot and enter TCI's Photo Contest.

Photos must depict some aspect of arboriculture.

First place: $250
Second-place: $100
Third-place: $50
Entries due June 1.

Photos also considered for the first annual National Arborist Foundation Calendar.

For further information, call TCI at 603-673-8952.
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1981 Ford LNT9000; CAT; 15 Spd; With O.C. TC150 15 Ton Crane; 80' Hook Height $49,500

1987 Chevy; V8 Eng.; 52 Tract. With Sky; Hook Height 122' Signal Crane $19,000

1978 Ford LT5000; 3406 CAT, 13 Spd, W/Natl & 8-75 Crane 17 Ton; 65' Hook Height $42,000

1984 INTL S5300; DT466 Eng.; 15 Spd; With Std 11-Ton Crane, 65' Hook Height $25,000

1978 International DT466 Dump With Crane $8,500

1981 GMC; 8.2 Diesel; 5 Spd or Auto.; Asplundh LS42, 45, 50 w/Wash & Jib; Bull-Chin $29,000 to $35,000

1988 Chevy; V8; 5x2 With Liftall 60' Double Bucket; 6,000 Mile $85,000

1971 Cabover; Ford; 5 Spd w/Wall; Truck-O-Liner Highway Stripper; 31,000 Miles $14,500

1976 Mack R560; Diesel; 5 Spd w/National 6 Ton Capacity Knuckelboom Crane (Nice) $22,500

1978 OMC; 3208 CAT; 5 Spd; Air Compressor; Welder; w/MT 6-Ton Knuckelboom (Nice) $14,500

1987 Ford F750; Diesel; 5x2; Air Brakes; Fitted w/Double Titan Knuckelboom Crane $23,500

1975 OMC V8 5 Spd With LR50 Morbark Ad Lift S C Body; 5 Others In Stock $24,300

1987 Ford F600; 6.6 Diesel; 5x2; 16' Wood Bed; 20,000# GVW; $9,000 To $11,500

1979 Ford V4; 5x2 With Texo 50' Bucket; 60' Wth Height $23,000 Ea.

1979 OMC; 3208 CAT; 5 Spd.; Air Compressor; Welder; w/MT 6-Ton Knuckelboom (Nice) $22,500

1978 OMC V-8; 5 Spd. With LP50 Asplundh Aerial Lift & Chip Body; 5 Others In Stock $21,400

1979 Ford V4; 5x2 With Texo 50' Bucket; 31,000 Mile $62,000

1981 OMC; 8.2 Diesel; 5 Spd or Auto.; Asplundh LS42, 45, 50 w/Wash & Jib; Bull-Chin $29,000 to $35,000

1988 Chevy; V8; 5x2 With Liftall 60' Double Bucket; 6,000 Mile $85,000

1971 Cabover; Ford; 5 Spd w/Wall; Truck-O-Liner Highway Stripper; 31,000 Miles $14,500

1979 Hino Tandem V8; 15 Spd; w/ReachAll 130' Bucket; Good Condition $19,500

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Tools & Business—Part II

By Donald F. Blair

(Last month’s column dealt with laptop computers. This month’s focus is on a variety of other “tools” that are fast-becoming vital to running a successful business.)

Multi-function watches

All my adult working life, I’ve carried a pocket watch. It has to be wound and all it does is tell me the time. Then my wife gave me a sports watch for my birthday that I use in my business. There are many brands and models to suit your needs and price range. For about $60, this watch provides me with several useful functions.

The dual-time feature allows me to set one mode to home office time and the other to wherever I happen to be.

The chronograph provides a 24-hour elapsed-time stopwatch feature. It can be set to start the clock on billable time for a consultation and in calculating travel time factors for a large project bid, i.e., time to the dump, yard, job, etc. Some vehicles also have this feature on the digital clock.

This watch also has a count-down timer that sounds an alarm when the set time is up. For example, I can set the timer for 60 minutes when I begin a consultation. The alarm establishes for me and the client the amount of time that has elapsed. At that point I can inform the client that the initial commitment has been satisfied and offer the option of extending or concluding the session.

Foremen can set the timer to the length of a safety meeting. And—something that seminar attendees will appreciate—I use the timer to be sure I finish speaking on time.

Besides the alarm, the hourly chime beeps twice on the hour to remind me that time is flying by. The alarm can be set to go off at any time for any purpose.

The watch is waterproof to 656 feet and is shock resistant. The battery in it means I won’t have to worry about “winding” it for seven years.

Video cameras

In addition to recording your son’s or daughter’s firsts—steps, bath, home run, etc.—I think a video camera has unparalleled versatility as a tree business tool.

If you do an interesting removal or some other tree maintenance operation, record the key features for future reference as a training aid.

Those special jobs can also be used as a sales tool to show a prospective client your versatility.

I won’t have to worry about “winding” it for seven years.

Nothing could document a training program better for your files than videotaping your employees attending and participating in a workshop.

If you acquire a new piece of equipment, tape the salesman making the orientation. That way you’ve got everything he said (or didn’t say) on tape so you don’t forget.

You can tape a property and discuss what the client wants to achieve. Playing that back to your project leader should eliminate possible misunderstandings. A videotape of a property showing cracked pavement, broken fence boards, crushed plants and dented car roofs prior to your team’s arrival on the job site could avoid a lot of accusations later. While such situations are not common, they have been known to happen.

Basically, cameras come in either a VHS or 8mm mode. The VHS cameras are full-size and use the standard VHS tape. The 8mm mini-cams weigh about two pounds, offer nearly as many features, cost about the same and take up a lot less space. The downside is having to transfer the images onto a VHS tape. I looked at the LUX rating, the running time on the
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Membership starts when you submit certificates of insurance.
Membership available to commercial Tree Service Firms only.

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battery, the zoom capacity and other features of interest. I was also interested in a camera with a manual focus and zoom override to the auto-zoom/focus modes. We finally settled on a model that weighs about six pounds and has incredible close-focusing capability, enabling me to do extremely detailed work on diagnostic subjects, i.e., growth cracks, borer damage, twig and leaf growth, etc.

Cameras
As popular as video cameras are, I believe that still photographs and slides have important tree business applications. For taking a photo of a tree to illustrate a work order or a proposal, recording pre-existing conditions or documenting your safety meeting, the "point-and-shoot" cameras are ideal.

Find a film you like and stick with it. I've pretty much settled on Kodachrome 64 slide film for most of my work. I'll use Kodachrome 200 when lower light levels require. I prefer transparencies because they make better slide shows, store easier and lend themselves to print work like brochures, magazine articles and calendars. You can always have the best ones turned into an enlarged photo image.

What we do as arborists is significant. Videos and still photography are excellent ways to record for posterity what we did and why.

FAX machines
The FAX is as basic a business tool as the telephone. If your market area is strictly residential, using your FAX as a sales tool will probably be limited. If you do a lot of work for commercial property managers or consultation, get one.

When I was based in California, most of my vendors were in the East. If I forgot to call in an order in the morning, I could send in my purchase orders for supplies at my convenience and have a written purchase order as a permanent record.

If you're wondering whether you can use a FAX, look at your business needs and habits. Are you spending a lot of time on the phone ordering things to keep your business running? How often do you get asked for your FAX number? Whom would you FAX to and why? Also, if you're already using the FAX down the street at the printer or the pizza place, watch your outgoing expense. It doesn't take long to pay for your own with regular use. When you go to buy, watch out for too many bells and whistles that you won't use. We had to accept features we didn't want and never use to get features that we did want. I looked for speed of transmission, reliability, local servicing and then I looked at price. We bought on a 13-month lease with a $1 buy-out at the end. We have one at each office.

Conclusion
As for service contracts on all this equipment, it's a good idea to research your options in order to be able to make an informed decision.

This article was written on a laptop computer on an airplane, in a motel room in Tampa and finished on my kitchen table. It was then networked into the office computers and printed on a daisy wheel printer. I logged my time on and off this project with the chronograph on my watch. The alarm reminded me when the time allotted for a given segment had expired. The manuscript was faxed to the editors of this magazine.

Later in the week I'm going to be shooting slides for a talk on the Dynamics of Urban Tree Hazard Reduction with a 35mm SLR. In Little Rock, Arkansas, I videotaped an aerial rescue workshop so that the participants would have a record and a source of reference.

Computers, cameras, watches, videos and FAX machines. They aren't the tools for the production or maintenance, but in support of your chipper, chain saw and bucket truck, they might become your most important business tools.

Donald F. Blair, arborist, author and lecturer, owns and operates Sierra Moreno Mercantile in Big Pool, Maryland.

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"BASIC TRAINING"
FOR FIELD PERSONNEL

NAA'S HOME STUDY PROGRAMS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Revised in 1991, National Arborist Association's Home Study programs are easy to use, economical and result in more efficient, productive, profitable field personnel.

HOME STUDY PROCEDURE:
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- Tests are sent to NAA office for correction.
- Upon completion of each program a certificate is awarded.

SERIES I and SERIES II provide basic information that everyone in the field should know. Among the topics:
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- Soils
- Compartmentalization
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Revealing Examinations

Root Crown Exams Uncover Disease, Hazards

By John C. Britton

(Editor’s Note: Trees can look healthy while they are failing mechanically. The root crown or root collar examination detects problems that could lead to unexpected failure of the tree’s support system. A simple examination can prevent endangerment of tree workers, tree care clients and their property. While this article addresses tree situations on the West Coast, the concept applies to tree care anywhere.)

Large native shade trees, such as Valley Oak (Quercus lobata) or the Coast Live Oak (Q. agrifolia), can be subject to failure even though few or no symptoms of the problem are visible in the canopy. This occurs because certain tree species can produce adventitious roots after extensive root loss or girdling injury occurs. When disease girdles large anchoring roots or roots are deprived of oxygen, they die and begin to decay. New callus forms above the injury, on the trunk, and may produce adventitious roots. The new roots keep the foliage green, but may not be large enough to anchor the tree.

Covering the above-ground bark of a tree’s trunk with moist soil interferes with air exchange and increases the bark’s susceptibility to disease. A common disease found under such situations is crown rot (Phytophthora), seen as blackened necrotic phloem tissue, often accompanied by oozing, or fluxing, of fluid from the bark. Oak root fungus (Armillaria mellea) may also infect the bark and wood. Symptoms are soft, yellowing bark tissue, often with a mat of fungal tissue growing on the cambium or bark cambium. If the soil has been raised for several months or years and portions of the bark are later killed, the trunk and buttress roots can be decaying while the tree still may appear healthy and structurally sound.

The arborist should thoroughly inspect the root crown of every tree that is examined for disease or hazard evaluation. A tree worker’s safety inspection of a tree before climbing should also include an examination of the tree’s root crown. If no root flares are present, soil has likely been raised over the original grade, or girdling roots may be present. A potentially dangerous situation may exist.

An examination of the root crown includes the removal of all soil around the trunk, six to 12 inches below the original grade. This exposes the major roots, which the arborist examines for signs of dead bark or decaying wood. Take care to pull dirt away from the roots rather than risk injury to the roots by driving a tool into the soil. A 1-to-2-pound pick/mattock is the most satisfactory tool we have found for this work. Remove soil embedded in the coarse bark of the trunk with a paint scraper and wisk broom. The scraper can also effectively remove rotted bark to the live phloem, if any remains. Remove dead bark with a chisel to the edge of live tissue or callus.

Healthy root tissue is bright pink to red or green. When you first see this, do not scrape deeper, but look for the margin of unhealthy tissue. Sunken bark areas with swollen edges often indicate the margin of callus tissue. If you find disease (dead, yellow to dark brown phloem) or decay, you should assess the extent of it and develop recommendations and treatment. Leave diseased roots open and exposed for at least one growing season, or until callus has begun to form. It may be necessary to cover roots to protect them from hot sun or winter cold. Cover healthy roots with soil to the original grade, leaving in-
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fested areas exposed for treatment.
Assess the percentage or amount of live roots by their anchoring and absorbing ability. If more than one-half of the root crown circumference is dead or diseased, the tree is likely to fail depending on the location of live roots, the lean of the tree, its weight and wind sail. Newly formed roots may be able to keep the tree alive, but they won’t be able to keep it upright and safe for many years. If you observe decay in the main buttress roots, you should assess the size, condition, and location of remaining unaffected roots or of newly formed adventitious roots.

After you complete the examination, return the soil to the original grade of the tree’s root crown. You can usually determine this by horizontal lines or wrinkles on the major buttress roots. Tree wells resulting from deep soil fills can be covered with grates or decks or surrounded by small fences to protect the public.

Leave diseased tissue exposed for one or more years, or until callus forms and the progress of the disease has stopped. Protect roots from freezing temperatures by covering them with mulch or soil, and expose them the next spring.

Keep tree trunks free of irrigation water. In our experience, serious disease and structural problems result from sprinkler irrigation hitting a tree’s trunk.

John Britton is a consulting arborist and president of John Britton Tree Service, St. Helena, California. This article was presented as an original paper at the Western Chapter, International Society of Arboriculture’s 50th Annual Conference, Anaheim, California, in May 1983, and again at the 55th Annual Conference, Oakland, California, in May 1988.

For the Record!
Growing and Staffing Your Business by Howard Eckel was represented incorrectly in the March issue of Tree Care Industry. The book was listed as a Second Edition when it should have read a Second Printing.

There have been no additional changes or additions to the original text as the ad stated. Therefore, if you purchased one of the original copies of Growing and Staffing Your Business, you need not purchase another as the material has not changed.

If you have any questions, please contact:
Howard L. Eckel & Associates
1-800-238-8510 - xtn. 444
Staffing Your Business

Interviewing, Hiring And Retaining Employees

By Howard L. Eckel

We started out to be arborists or involved in some aspect of the green industry. Yet, some of our major concerns revolve around finding and keeping competent personnel, according to a spot sampling I did prior to this most recent recession. The catch is that most of us have little or no expertise in the personnel area.

In addition to this lack of expertise, other factors complicate the process of staffing. According to demographers, there will be anywhere from 8% to 12% fewer 18- to 20-year-olds entering the job market in this decade. A major problem is that none of them come with personal operations and maintenance manuals. Think about it. Every piece of equipment you purchase will have the manufacturer's recommendations for trouble-free performance, a set of instructions outlining the proper care with maintenance schedules. Every product we purchase has labels specifically detailing proper use. We can call the Extension Service or universities for all sorts of technical help. The new applicant or new hire, however, arrives with nothing to guide you in obtaining trouble-free maximum potential.

In summary then, you are not trained nor do you have any expertise in staffing and personnel development and there are going to be fewer people to attract. Those whom you do hire don't come with instructions and operating manuals. To top it off, there are very few places to turn for help.

All is not gloom and doom, however. The solution we want to the problem of staffing is a group of wonderful, productive, safe-working, clever, knowledgeable, articulate, honest, dependable employees, dedicated to their job and company, who are hard-working, causing minimum problems. If you are really secure you will add your future replacement to this list.

Recruit

Now you have to go out and find those employees. I do not like the word “hire,” nor the concept behind it. I prefer the word “recruit.” It has a ring of longevity and being “in command” about it. You can advertise for “walk-ons” when you need them, but I think you're limiting yourself. In spite of predictions of a shrinking labor pool, there are many talented young people already in the workplace. They want an opportunity. They may be employed in other industries, often in what they perceive as dead-end jobs. Recruit them!

You come across people every day who you wish were on your staff—the woman at the grocery check-out counter, the lad bagging your groceries. Tell them you work in a fantastic profession where they can maximize their personal potential and learn something new every day.

You should constantly be recruiting, even if you currently don’t have an opening. You can offer your business card with an invitation to call your office to set up a preliminary interview. Recruiting rather than hiring ensures that your staff is an extension of you, your firm’s goals and the image you want to project.

Talk to local high schools, community colleges, churches and civic clubs about the wonderful opportunities available in one of the best professions. A couple of times a year show your face at the placement office of colleges that offer programs in horticulture, arboriculture, landscape construction and maintenance. Tell the placement officer about your firm and the opportunities. Talk to the dean and the department head. Recruit the best potential players. Before long, you'll have a bank account full of names, the most promising in your area.

The absorption document

Remember that these recruits will not show up at your door with operating or maintenance manuals. You will have to
You are going to tell and show these recruits exactly what their career development program is going to span. Never employ and then explain. Explain and then employ. Eliminate surprises. This absorption plan is essential for your firm's future.

When you begin to write the absorption plan, include your crew leaders and climbers. Their involvement ensures their cooperation and enthusiasm. They will think of items to include that you don’t. Also, use the manuals that came with your equipment, regulations from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, insurance company safety material, and material from the National Arborist Association and the International Society of Arboriculture.

Placing the recruit

Now that you have added to your staff, where do you place the new recruit? With the crew that is short a person, or on the big job? With the key production crew leader, your top producer? Not necessarily. You place the new staffer with the best teacher you have.

Last year while on a consulting assignment, I watched as a new employee was assigned to a crew leader for the day. The crew leader became quite upset and agitated. I doubt that either he or the new employee had a good day. When I pointed out the situation to the manager, he replied that the crew leader was a good man, but did not like change and had no patience. The lesson to be learned here is that the recruit can work with that crew leader some day, but not until he is more experienced and can carry the work load better. There are great crew leaders in the industry, but not all of them are proficient teachers.

Who is your best training crew leader? The one that really became enthused when everyone sat down and helped develop the absorption document. The one who is patient and likes to take people under his wing. This is the person that the new recruit starts with. You appoint this crew leader as your trainer. This trainer has a complete set of job descriptions and specific job responsibilities—the absorption plan. Your new recruit has the same set of documents. He or she understands exactly what must be learned and mastered while the trainer knows what needs to be taught and the teaching order.

You now have a measuring stick for the walk-on who claims to be experienced—a set of standards to be met.

If you do not have a person capable of training, then you become the trainer. Other than making sales, training is the most important thing you do. Even a couple of hours a week spent working with the new recruit will bring you rewards ten-fold. Take the time. You are in the service business, and that requires that you efficiently organize people’s efforts to ensure client satisfaction.

By the way, while you were starting to solve your staffing problems, you started
to organize your organization. You established one of the key ingredients of the successful organization: communication.

Retention

Now that you have some new recruits, you have to retain them. I find several common threads when I analyze retention. Often, the owner/manager does not have a clear understanding of what people want from an employment opportunity. I find it strange that the retention problem even exists; it doesn’t cost the owner/manager anything to solve the problem. All it takes is an understanding of what employees want and then creating the proper atmosphere for them to achieve their personal goals. In most cases, the company goals are not that different from theirs. Recognize that one of the reasons you recruited these employees was because they were ambitious, earnest, wanting to get ahead in the future. Is that different from what you want?

Creating the correct atmosphere is not complicated, but it is a mystery to some managers. For at least 30 years I have monitored polls on what employees deem important. Simply stated, these polls show year after year that employees want to be part of an organization and that organization’s enthusiasm. They want to grow with the firm and they want to be part of the future. They want to be recognized, to be appreciated, to be guided so they can perform better, hence improving their own futures. Money, as in wages, is usually ranked fourth or fifth in importance. They want to be managed with dignity and to work in an organization that realizes people are important assets.

How can you create such an atmosphere? After a few weeks, go out in the yard and see that new recruit. Ask questions and offer praise, if warranted. Show an interest. Schedule periodic performance evaluations with the recruit and the trainer on a regular basis. In fact, do this for all employees on a regular schedule, not just at raise time. Communicate. Be appreciative.

Your sincere interest will generate enthusiasm and will return rewards that will more than make up for the time you spend with your employees. Happy, competent people will sell even more work. Clients pick up the vibrations given off by your employees. If they are positive, if they are an extension of you, the client will feel reinforced in the decision to engage your services and will recommend your firm.

If you recruit, absorb, train, monitor and counsel, you’ll soon be able to go back to doing what you started to do in the first place...taking care of all things green.

Howard L. Eckel retired as the executive vice president of The Davey Tree Expert Company. He was general manager of the parent Kent and Eastern Canadian Companies. He is the principal of Howard L. Eckel & Associates, business consultants specializing in supplying skilled, experienced management on a temporary basis to develop solutions to business problems. He is the author of “Growing and Staffing Your Business.” He is an associate member of the National Arborist Association and a member of the International Society of Arboriculture. His address is P.O. Box 1197, Marathon, FL 33050. Phone: 800-233-8510, ext. 444.

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Two Named To Vice President Positions At Vermeer

Officials of Vermeer Manufacturing Company, in Pella, Iowa, have announced the appointment of two managers to positions of vice president.

Director of Marketing Jarrett Cowden has been named Vice President of Marketing, and former SP Division Manager Pat Weiler has been named Vice President of Vermeer-Underground.

CEO Bob Vermeer and President Mary Andringa made the announcement following the decision at a board meeting earlier this year.

Cowden joined Vermeer a year ago, after 15 years with the Charles Machine Works of Perry, Oklahoma. He is responsible for all marketing functions, including sales, marketing research, advertising, dealer marketing programs and corporate marketing programs.

Weiler joined Vermeer in 1980 as a project engineer for track trenchers. Three years later he was named Director of Engineering and more recently was manager of the Specialized Products Division.

Associations Consolidate Trade Shows

Four regional New England green industry associations are working toward consolidating trade shows in 1993.

The regional show, New England Grows '93, is scheduled for February 3 and 4, 1993, at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston and is expected to draw attendees from all six New England states.

The Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts (ALCM), the Massachusetts Arborists Association (MAA), the Massachusetts Nurserymen's Association (MNA) and the New England Nurserymen's Association (NENA) will forego their 1993 trade shows in a gesture of support for New England Grows '93, to make it the largest green industry trade show in New England.

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Technic Tool Corp. has added an automatic oiling system to the Power Pruner, which is equipped with a drive shaft that extends from seven to 11 feet. The cutting head consists of a 10-inch sprocket nose chain bar, chrome-plated, three-eighths-inch pitch cutting chain and a patented cutting shoe. The cutting head with automatic oiler is crafted from tooled-steel fiberglass and hardened beveled gears. For more information contact Technic Tool Corp., 725 29th Street North, P.O. Box 1406, Lewiston, Idaho 83501. Phone: 208-746-9011.

Holan has introduced two new “829 Series” heavy-duty service lifts designed for the electric utility and arborist industries and featuring improved side reach. The 829-50 is ideal for tree trimming applications offering a 55-foot working height and overcenter side reach of more than 41 feet. The 829-45 is a versatile service unit providing more than 38 feet of non-overcenter side reach with all the advantages of an overcenter lift. Contact Holan Sales, P.O. Box 666, 5600 West 88th Ave., Westminster, CO 80030. Phone: 303-427-3700.

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**LIST OF ADVERTISERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reader Service Number*</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Reader Service Number*</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ACRT</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18 National Arborist Association</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 American Arborist Supplies, Inc</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 NAA Home Study Program</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Andy's Truck Center</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20 NAA Video Training</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Border City Tool</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21 Northeastern Associates</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 J.P. Carlton Co.</td>
<td>Inside Front Cover</td>
<td>22 Oral Ivy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Creative Sales</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23 Opdyke, Inc.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 East Hill</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24 Rayco Manufacturing, Inc</td>
<td>6, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Echo</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25 Schodorf</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Howard Eckel</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26 Source Technology Biologicals</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Elvex</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27 Southco Industries, Inc</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Fox Manufacturing</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28 Tamarack Clearing</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 GFX Corp.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29 TCI Expo</td>
<td>Inside Back Cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Hawaiian Landscape Council</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30 Technic Tool</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Kemp West, Inc.</td>
<td>14, 22</td>
<td>31 Time Manufacturing Co</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Leonardi Manufacturing, Inc</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32 Vermeer Mfg. Co.</td>
<td>Back Cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Levco Manufacturers, Inc</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33 Western Tree &amp; Landscape Supply</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 J.J. Mauget Company</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Of Rocks In High Places

By Jeff Sullivan

After an exceptionally dry year, the Western Pine beetle was taking a toll on many of the pine trees in our coastal mountain area of northern California. Although it had a way of drumming up business, it was always somewhat of a tragedy to see these beautiful trees, often at the center of a home’s landscape, wither and die.

Such was the case with a job we were called to bid on in a rural neighborhood a few miles from town. A tall Ponderosa pine growing in a small front yard between the house and a busy road had died and needed to be climbed and taken down in sections.

We left a written estimate with the homeowner. Since I often passed by the house on my way home, I noticed that another tree service had started on the job. However, the tree was just limbed, topped down a bit and then left standing for many weeks like a 70-foot pole in the front yard. Eventually we were hired to take the rest of the tree down. We also learned why the other tree service had abandoned the job.

As I stood at the base of the tree and strapped on my climbing gear, the customer ran it by me one more time. “Yeah,” he chuckled, “the guy said he kept hitting rocks in the tree way up there and it was wrecking his chain saw.”

I laughed a little, too. “I’ve heard ‘em all now,” I said, as unconvinced as he was at the excuse not to finish the job.

Up I went and tied the bull rope onto the top section so my groundman could help land it in just the right spot in the small front yard. Soon after I began my first cut, I felt that awful sensation of saw teeth cutting rock followed by instant dullness. I pulled the 24-inch bar out and looked closely at the tree bark. Tiny stones were embedded deep inside hundreds of woodpecker holes scattered all over the tree. I learned later the birds sometimes do this to help collect insects inside, though normally they store only acorns.

I lowered the saw down for sharpening and chiseled out the rocks in a ring around the spot where I wanted to make a cut, using the claw end of a carpenter’s hammer. This way, slowly but surely, we got the tree down and all bucked up.

It was a good lesson that I should have already known: In the tree service business, just about anything is possible at least once.

Jeff Sullivan formerly owned and operated Sullivan Tree Service in Santa Cruz, California. He is currently employed with the wood products division of Potlatch Corporation and resides in Bemidji, Minnesota.

Do you have a story for From the Field? TCI will pay $100 for published articles. Submissions become the property of TCI and are subject to editing for grammar, style and length. Entries must bear the name of the author and his/her employer or school or they will not be considered for publication. Articles and photos must be received by the first day of the month for the following month’s issue.
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