

# PUBLIC RELATIONS IN URBAN FORESTRY

by Robert L. Tate

An informed citizen is easier to work with. He may not agree with your policies and plans but will respect your judgment for giving him the information about what your operation, a part of his government, is doing. A new program is easier to implement if citizens are aware of it before it is put into practice.

An equally important need for new program information can be found even within the bureaucracy. As many know, in most cities political decision makers are not full time. They are elected or appointed for a short period of time and cannot learn the inner working of bureaucracy in their short time in office. In some cases they have been voted into office with a deep concern for righting the wrongs found in government and "caused" by bureaucracy. They, like most citizens, are concerned about the spending of the tax dollar. This person is very receptive to pressure from his constituents and unfortunately, as most government employees know, the public doesn't usually call to compliment but to complain. A political decision maker that is made aware of the desirable and popular activities of a unit of government is less receptive to entertain suggestions of budget redirections in that agency. It is not wrong for a public official to build a following.

## The Method, The Media, and Whom to Reach

How then does an urban forester get his message into the hands of those he desires to reach and who are these people he wants to reach? In government we serve a series of publics. Each public is interested in one or more specific services and becomes active when it perceives these services to be less than the standards it deserves. An example can clarify this. When a city's streets begin to deteriorate, persons in the city who would have nothing else in common began to speak in a collective voice for street improvement. Their politically elected representatives and members of the bureaucracy are alerted and made aware that a shifting of priorities must

come about in order to provide funds for street repair. If and when the street repairs are made, that public ceases to be a unit and goes its separate ways. And so it is with the public we urban foresters serve. Some examples of the people who comprise our public could be the ubiquitous tree lover, persons we've alienated by our actions (cutting down trees, planting trees which are too small, etc.) and persons who generally desire the services we perform on trees.

Now that we know who it is we are trying to reach, let's examine the ways in which we reach them.

The most effective way to disseminate our message is by the use of direct public relations. As the term implies, this method takes the form of a face to face meeting with the public, by the urban forester or members of his staff. It can be accomplished by training supervisors and crewmen to deal with persons, courteously and cordially, taking time to quickly explain what is being done and why. City Foresters do this on a regular basis. Handouts given to individuals explaining a particular operation like tree trimming and planting are extremely effective. Sick tree clinics and meetings are also effective.

Indirect public relations is the other form in which we may get our message across. Newspapers, television and radio are the most commonly used media available to urban foresters. To be sure, we cannot compete with the more sensational news in today's average newspaper, but we do offer very readable news for our public. Newspaper reporters and feature writers are constantly on the move looking for news and we are viable news sources. News that may appear old hat to us, such as spring tent caterpillars in flowering cherries and crabapples, may be an important story to many people.

The news professionals will help you bring out and develop a good story if they are alerted to it. Radio and television are somewhat more complicated than newspapers and do not lend frequently themselves to the "in depth" story. But,

radio and T.V. can dramatize particularly bad insect or disease problems in a manner that the newspaper story can't.

Now that you are armed with the method, the medium and whom to reach, how do you succeed in getting it to your public? In direct public relations, I have illustrated several ways such as meetings, handouts, use of your crewpersons and the like. Indirect public relations is also relatively simple. There are basically three paths one may use. The first is the press release.

In a press release you write up what you want to say in about 300 words or less, stamp "Press Release" on it and mail it off to the news media. One word of caution, most unsolicited press releases are thrown away before they reach print.

The second way to reach the public is the pseudo-event, a rather sinister sounding term which has been put to good use by news sources for centuries. The pseudo-event is something "staged" for the press. It is neither illegal nor immoral. On the contrary, it's a bit of news made better. The best example of a pseudo-event I can think of is the typical car vs. tree happening with which most of us are familiar. Instead of immediately sending a couple of men to patch the tree, call the newspaper first, and let them know that a car just took a few inches of bark out of one of your nicest specimens. It's happened before on other trees but you'd really like to call the citizen's attention to it. A photographer probably will be dispatched to the site and hopefully your people will be there patching things up.

The third and most effective way of communicating is by the use of news tips. Get to know who covers the news beat that deals with trees and acquaint yourself with that person. In many cases you may find yourself working with a specialized writer, such as the city hall reporter and/or the garden editor, or someone on the city desk. Don't be a pest, but call these people once in a while and point out what you think is an interesting item about trees. More often than not, they'll use it.

At this point many of you are thinking, they didn't hire me to write newspaper stories: I was hired as the city forester. True, they didn't hire

you to be a newspaper reporter, but your job as city forester is to take care of the trees in your jurisdiction. Good public relations will aid you in this job. It's just as important as anything else you can do because you are serving the public better by keeping them informed. A city forester who isn't interested in that isn't measuring up in my opinion.

### Discussion

A public relations program is not as formidable as it sounds. It doesn't have to take up more than an hour a week and it's really not that difficult to do. If the thought of dealing with newspapers, radio and T.V. comes hard for you, don't abandon the whole program. Do what you feel better doing, for example distributing handouts, and instructing your crewpeople in how to deal with questions from the public. If you are still concerned, check with someone in your city government about helping with public relations. Many cities are now hiring public information aides. A telephone call to the journalism department of a nearby college or university can often bring you much help.

I believe the time spent on public relations will return more benefits by far than anything else you could do with the same amount of time. Moreover, I think it's an important part of good urban forestry.

The application of public relations is an integral part of the practice of urban forestry. As urban foresters, we have a message to get across to the people of our jurisdiction. This message carried as part of our public relations program can enlighten the community about the benefits, problems and costs of an urban forest.

The message can be separated into two major parts: 1) specific information about trees including planting, insects, diseases, and maintenance practices and 2) exposure of a program in which taxpaying citizens can observe the actions of their government and the use of their tax dollars.

There is a real need for us to get our message across in today's critical political climate. We, as public officials, have an obligation to inform the public about how the tax dollars are being spent. Most cities try to do this by distributing charts

and graphs explaining how the dollars are allocated. The portion of the budget allotted to urban forestry is comparatively small but we must convince the public that even these funds are wisely and efficiently spent.

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## NEW APPROACH TO INSECT CONTROL<sup>1</sup>

by David G. Nielsen

Pesticides have come under increasing attack as environmental pollutants during the 1970's. Concern for potentially harmful long-range side effects from certain insecticide usage led to a surge in State and Federal support for research programs designed to discover and develop alternative methods of insect control. Loss and threat of loss of residual insecticides through legislation, and poor performance of these materials against some economically important insects, necessitated evaluation of other classes of insecticides and new approaches to insect control.

One major area of research is with sex pheromones, naturally-occurring chemicals which insects release to attract mates. A number of borers of woody ornamentals rely on such pheromones to facilitate mate location. These insects, which construct galleries in living tissues of woody plants, are the most destructive pests of woody ornamentals for which we do not have adequate control recommendations.

A research program was initiated at the OARDC in 1971 to improve borer control practices. A peculiar group of borers that mimic wasps, the clearwing moths, was chosen for this study because: (1) several of its members are serious pests of nursery and landscape plants (they are also pests of cucurbits and grapes); (2) adequate populations were available for study; and (3) they are day fliers, facilitating observation of behavioral patterns.

The first species studied was the lilac borer, *Podosesia syringae* (Harris), which was reported to fly during June in Ohio. During 1971-72, it was confirmed that this insect does emerge from lilac and ash in spring but that it or a very similar moth

also emerges from ash in late summer (late August through September).

In 1971, we discovered that virgin female lilac borers emit a sex attractant when they are ready to mate. The chemical or chemicals emitted attracts males of its own kind (species) and males in at least three other genera of the clearwing moth family. Subsequently we have discovered that many clearwing moths respond to the same or similar sex attractants. Discovery of this phenomenon, sometimes called cross-attraction, means that a control method utilizing a sex attractant for one clearwing moth might be adaptable for controlling several other economically important borers.

Cooperative studies with the United States Department of Agriculture Insect Attractants, Behavior, and Basic Biology Research Laboratory located at Gainesville, Florida, have revealed that a sex pheromone isolated from peachtree borer, *Sanninoidea exitiosa* (Grote and Robinson), is attractive to lilac borer; dogwood borer, *Synanthredon scitula* (Harris); an oak borer, *Paranthrene simulans* Luggler; and other clearwing moths. This attractant and related synthetic sex pheromones are currently being produced commercially in Ohio for use in research programs throughout the United States and abroad.

While one isomer (chemical form) of the synthetic sex pheromone is the best attractant for a particular species, another isomer, or a combination of two or more isomers, may be best for attracting another moth. We are currently investigating formulation of different isomers and combinations of isomers to determine the best combinations for borers that attack woody plants. We are also evaluating trap design, since we know

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from *New Horizons*, 1975 (Horticultural Research Institute, Washington, D.C.)