THE ARBORIST NEEDED?

by Robert C. McConnell

The Arborist Needed? You'd better believe it! Environmentally speaking, there may be no person more important to any city, township or borough than its arborists. No community, regardless of its size, can exist without trees and the competent arborists who must care for them.

Philadelphia is a typical example. The 8600 acres of Fairmount Park contain over 3 million trees. In addition to this number, another 300,000 trees line the city's streets. This audience knows how important these trees are. Without them there would be no park system and the ecological balance so vitally important to the city would be nonexistent. Countless talks and entire books have been written on the importance of trees to man, especially in the urban environment.

But planting trees is only the first step. Once these trees are planted in our parks and along our streets, parkways and boulevards, they need the continuous, competent supervision of a trained arborist.

Philadelphia recognized this need as far back as 1913 when it started its own Shade Tree Commission. In 1913, $50,000 was appropriated for street tree work. The Commission's budget was inadequate to do a proper job of tree maintenance. There was a need for over 50 qualified arborists to handle the bulk of tree work generated within the city. The Commission did recognize the need for this work to be performed by qualified experts in the field of tree care. We know full well how improper or careless tree maintenance can injure a tree resulting in years of damage, sometimes even permanent damage.

To do a proper job of tree maintenance, the arborist is often assisted by a host of other professionals including engineers, foresters, horticulturists, and landscape architects. Their combined knowledge and efforts allow the arborist to devote full time to proper tree maintenance and care, including the formulation and enforcement of regulations governing the care of street and park trees.

Too many people think our cities are ugly today. This may be true. But one thing we can say with certainty is that the competently trained arborist is not responsible for this ugliness. Look around any city of almost any size and you'll see areas that needed the attention of a qualified arborist long ago. But all too often the arborist is overlooked or faces a cool reception. Why?

In many instances, the city arborist must rely on unskilled and/or uninterested personnel to accomplish his mission. A broad knowledge of human behavior is necessary if effective results are to be obtained in the maintenance of park and street trees. This factor is undoubtedly present throughout the maintenance and service portions of other government functions, but in tree maintenance living plants are involved and there is a very fine line between success and failure. To insure the success of any city tree maintenance program the arborist must be able to adapt to his instructions, making sure his directives are well understood by those persons performing the maintenance operation.

Any tree program is long-range in concept and must be capable of expansion and contraction in response to budgetary provisions and public desires. To cope with these requirements, a city arborist must be versatile and not easily discouraged. He must accept limited accomplishments when changes are directed and persist in his efforts in the face of repeated defeats.

In my opinion, the successful administration of the care of trees presents problems that can only be solved by keen observation and broad experience, and requires the continuous attention of the person administering the program.

We can plant trees along the streets and we can plant trees and shrubs in the proper open spaces where they can be grown to add much beauty to the city environment. As arborists, we know that the need for open space is increasing, especially in congested urban areas. It is up to the arborist to see that these areas are properly planted for the benefit of future generations.

All too often we find courses in park administration being offered in colleges with little or no connection to any other activities. I find it hard to believe that an instructor, not properly grounded in arboriculture, can offer proper training to others equally uninformed. The arborist, because of his practical knowledge and experience, must be an active participant in the instruction of others.

I firmly believe that the municipal arborist has too long been overlooked by the municipal planners. The city arborist is just as important as the civil, mechanical and traffic engineers, the lawyers, and businessmen who make the city flow smoothly from day to day. The arborist's actions, attitudes and proposals must be publicized, explained and understood by those with whom he comes in contact if tree care is to become accepted and supported in the city.

Just who is qualified to administer park areas? I cannot believe that someone whose only qualification is the number of votes he can influence is properly qualified. The qualified administrator must have a practical, working knowledge not just of trees and parks but also of botanical gardens, arboretums, museums, etc. All of these areas are vitally important to the arboricultural component of the city environment. Tremendous efforts are being made to inform more agencies about proper tree maintenance in order to aid the arborist in his work. But we still have a long way to go before the public and the municipal administrators are fully and properly educated about tree care.

In summary, I don't think there is anyone in municipalities better qualified to administer the beautification of open space than the municipal arborist. Who else is trained in landscaping, horticulture, entomology, plant pathology, soil science, business management, city planning, park and street tree management, etc.? The municipal arborist is one of the city's most valuable human resources. We should and must do everything in our power to make sure that this resource is not wasted.

Director, Fairmount Park
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

Behlen, Dorothy. 1980. **1980 Supplement to the national register of big trees.** American Forests 86(4): 11-16.

The biggest recent change in the national register was sparked by the long-awaited publication last year of Elbert L. Little's *Checklist of United States trees (native and naturalized).* With the new Checklist in hand, we have weeded the register, pulling out those species that are not considered native or naturalized in the U.S. This process should make the national register more representative of American trees. We have sought out champions for those eligible species that are not yet represented in the register. Included in this supplement, for the first time, is a list of those species.