

1. Physiological and environmental stresses — The effects of air pollution, construction, heavy clay soils, salt spray, and drought are only a few examples.
2. Tree fertilization — How does fertilization affect susceptibility to insects and disease organisms? What are the best formulations and application techniques for various soil types?
3. Pest control — The basic biology of many tree pests is poorly understood. New control materials and application techniques are needed.
4. Tree selection — Coordinate tree selection programs.
5. New diagnostic equipment.
6. Social and recreational aspects.

Urban tree research in the South is needed and justified, and the expertise is available. Our efforts must be expanded and coordinated. Research is expensive, however. As professionals, each of us must be willing to persuade legislatures, foundations, private companies, and other funding agencies of the necessity of arboricultural research. Urbanization and population in the South are expanding at breakneck rates. Research can enable the arboriculture profession to meet the challenge of this growth. Each of you can be instrumental in the growth of arboricultural research!

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## WHY CHARGE A FEE? <sup>1</sup>

by **Kenneth D. Meyer**

Thank God for trees. A fitting theme for an organization devoted to preserving trees. Our present belief that trees are important evolved over a long period of time. Four thousand years ago Emperor Shun of China ordered both sides of the 2500 mile long Yellow River cleared of trees to produce more crop land which would ultimately bring him more tax money. He ordered his chief forester to set fire to the trees which was dutifully done. For one year all went well and the emperor was acclaimed. But then, the melting winter snow eroded the soil, hot summer winds dried the soil, winds further eroded it, streams leading to the Yellow River silted-up and the Yellow River flooded. To this day the Yellow River is known to the people of China as "China's Sorrow." They have developed the belief that "The spirits of the forest are taking revenge."

A forest is a multitude of trees interrelated with one and another and having its own unique ecosystem. To most of you here today, I am sure that a single tree is more important to you than

those miles of forest were to Emperor Shun. We have more knowledge of the importance of trees. We have a greater realization of the benefits derived from trees. We have more information regarding the care of trees.

The accumulated volumes of literature on trees over the past 4,000 years are far too extensive for any single human to read in his lifetime. Yet many of you have devoted a great amount of time studying trees. With few exceptions your interest has turned into a livelihood, and if like mine, a very beautiful and rewarding livelihood. Yet, I am jealous. I am jealous of the information I have acquired on trees over the years. As much as I love to talk about trees and their care, I feel cheated if I am not compensated for my knowledge. And strangely enough, I believe the people I talk to feel cheated if they do not think well enough of my talents to compensate me for them.

<sup>1</sup> Presented to the Western Chapter, ISA, in May of 1976.

### Precedents

I hate to make comparisons between ours and other businesses and I have many times pondered the question whether tree care is a trade or a profession. It does, however, appear clear to me that professions charge for their time and knowledge, whereas trades charge for a physical output, i.e., work. Our local telephone book lists 48 tree care firms, 14 of which have large advertisements. All but four of these list *free estimates*. In contrast, there are 42 advertisements for T.V. repairs with 3 listings for *free estimates*. Physicians do not advertise in the telephone directory and to my knowledge, offer no free estimates. Since we, like physicians, are dealing with living entities, I rather enjoy making the comparison between doctors and arborists. And, like a doctor, we are practicing an art based on scientific premises. What we have observed and noted in the past may be far more important in diagnosing and suggesting remedial tree care actions than experimenting based on recent discoveries.

The only selling you should have to do is sell people the idea that they should have *you* look at their trees on a fee basis. It is not easy to do this, particularly when most everyone is offering free estimates. But in my way of thinking, there is no such thing as a free estimate. Somewhere along the line someone is paying for this time. It may appear in higher costs in doing the work or less of a job for the sum paid. And, I cannot conceive of an individual remaining completely objective if he must sell tree work to make his existence. It is for these reasons that I feel free estimates should be discouraged, and hopefully someday the International Society of Arboriculture will be a leader by providing this provision in their Code of Ethics.

I mentioned earlier that a salesman must find it hard to remain objective. Ideally, a consultant should not act as a contractor. However, to many of us this is not practical. There is often not enough consulting work in our working areas to justify a full time consulting service.

Another source of income is needed. To those of you who are in this predicament, I offer this

alternative. Charge a fee for all calls that you make. Then, if the client should decide to have your firm undertake the work, either refund the consultation fee or reduce it in proportion to the amount of work undertaken. In this way it is possible to wear two hats, both as a contractor and a consultant. The client is paying for your time and knowledge. They have the right to use it as they like, even to the extent of giving it out to competing firms. I would, however, make three exceptions to this practice. One, if you are acting as a consultant in drawing up specifications where public bids are to be called for, you should divorce yourself from bidding. This would avoid any conflict of interest. Secondly, if you are providing information to a client who has used you exclusively in the past, charging a consulting fee is unnecessary. Presumably you will derive benefit from the tree work either as a result of your call or sometime in the future. However it does make sense to remind your clients that you are extending this privilege and that your time has value. And finally, if detailed specifications are available, including requests for insurance and inspections on work in progress and upon completion, you could act as an estimator knowing you are on equal footing with others.

### Conclusion

For those of you who have been pondering the decision to charge consulting fees for estimates or not, I challenge you to try it. In most cases, you will find the income generated from consulting fees will make up the profit from lost jobs. There will always be individuals who shop around for free estimates. For those of you who do not charge consultation fees, you must realize that you are competing with men like Emperor Shun, who did not do his homework and caused great devastation to this day.

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