

ARBORICULTURAL EDUCATION—IS THERE A PROBLEM?¹

by H. Dennis P. Ryan III

During the past four years I have attended approximately 45 arborist conferences on the national, state and local levels. In hundreds of conversations at these meetings I keep hearing the same problem — manpower! "My best salesman left me." "My spray foreman got a job with the post office." "I am having trouble finishing a contract because I can't find any climbers." Unfortunately those comments may sound all too familiar to you. Education can help, in a limited way, to relieve *some* of these personnel problems, but not all.

Arboricultural Education

Arboricultural education takes place on 3 levels in the United States: high school, college, and industry.

High School programs vary from state to state. For example, Massachusetts has an arboriculture program in its three county agricultural high schools. A major advantage of the Massachusetts plan is that the schools require a 5 month internship each year. This summer placement amounts to 20 months of tree work experience by the time the student graduates from high school. This work experience combined with courses in arboriculture, entomology, pathology, etc. makes for a very qualified employee.

New York State also has arboriculture taught at some of its agricultural high schools. One of the most successful programs in New York State is the program in Westchester County under the direction of Mr. George McCabe.

Arboriculture could easily be taught on the high school level. All that is required is a few thousand dollars for tools and a good teacher. The secret of a good program is having a teacher who is familiar with the arborist industry. A teacher who has worked in the industry and is actively interested in the industry, will be able to train students in commercial arboriculture.

Arboricultural Education on the college level can be broken down into two categories: 2 year programs with associate degrees, and 4 year programs with bachelors degrees.

The oldest college teaching arboriculture is the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, Amherst, Massachusetts. This excellent program is headed by Gordon King, Past President of the International Society of Arboriculture. This school is regarded by many as the number one school of arboriculture in the United States. The reason for its success is the close contact between the school and the arborist industry.

In 1978 the State University of New York at Farmingdale, New York expanded its arboriculture program and graduated its first class in June 1980. The Farmingdale program is molded after the Stockbridge School and is receiving needed support from the arborist industry.

There are several other college programs across the country and some of them have received favorable reports from industry, BUT many have not! The main complaint is that they do not teach the required commercial skills and technical information needed in the field.

The arborist industry has traditionally trained the majority of the arborists in business. Much of the industry teaching is done by experienced foremen showing the new ground person or climber how to do their job safely.

For many years large companies such as Davey and Bartlett have conducted training programs. While these programs are not as large as they once were, they still fill a needed gap for the large companies, but the small companies which make up the majority of this industry needed some form of training.

The National Arborist Association has the philosophy that if there is a need not being met, they will try to fill that need. One of the biggest and most successful training aids is the National

¹Presented at the annual conference of the National Arborist Association in Orlando, Florida in February 1980.

Arborist Association HOME STUDY PROGRAM. This was first written in 1970 by Dr. James Kielbaso and Dr. Melvin Koelling and has just been revised. This program has been used by over 2000 persons and was reprinted during 1980.

The National Arborist Association is also filling a training need in the area of safety. This has been accomplished by the use of a series of slides with accompanying tape recordings. To fill guidelines set up by OSHA, the National Arborist Association has recently published a series of *Tail Gate Safety Programs*.

One of the key problems when hiring a person to work in the tree business is that most don't know a proper pruning cut or how to tie a clove hitch. Not only is this costly and inefficient but in many cases it is a safety hazard. The National Arborist Association Summer Field Training Short Course is attempting to fill this void.

We've taken a quick look at the training of arborists in the United States, but we haven't answered the question, "Is there a problem and if the answer is yes, what is it?" The answer, of course, is YES. The National Arborist Association established that there is a shortage of 14,000 capable tree workers, but the blame does not rest entirely on the educators. *You*, the commercial arborist, must assume part of the responsibility.

Relieving the Shortage — Possible Solutions

Possible solutions to relieving the personnel shortage could include the following:

Education. Education has its place and it definitely can aid your business. If you have a weak school program in your state, insist that the program be strengthened (Fig. 1). If there is no arboricultural education program in a local agricultural high school or community college, find out why. The arborist industry is a political force but many times we don't use this power. REMEMBER the squeaky wheel gets the grease!

Publicity. Most of the publicity that the arborist receives is unfavorable. We make the newspaper or television when there is an accident of some type (Fig. 2), an arborist is injured, pesticide is spilled, etc. Work at getting GOOD publicity.

Blow your horn! Most of the people in this country have no idea what an arborist is. If the adults of

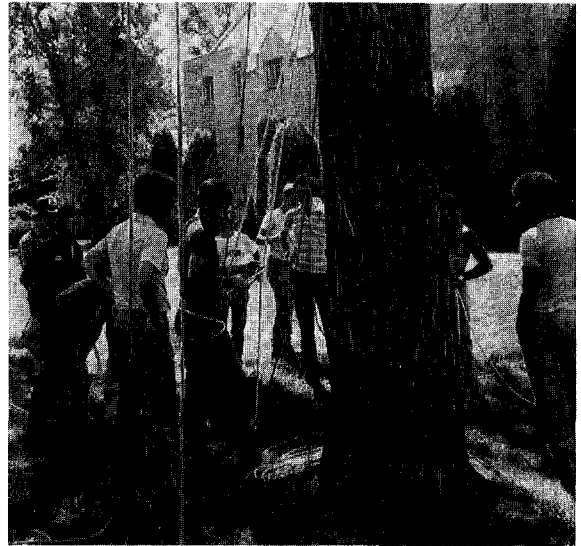


Fig. 1. High School and College educations must include commercial skills and field experience.

One Neighbor's Spray



Newsday Illustration by John Kier

Is Another's Poison

Fig. 2. This headline followed by a half page editorial appeared in *Newsday*, a newspaper with a circulation of 500,000. This publicity is unfortunately more typical of what arborists receive.

this country do not know who you are, how can you expect their children to know? If you ask a 13-year-old what he wants to be, you'll hear all sorts of answers: doctor, nurse, lawyer, logger, teacher, forester or even a garbage man, but have you ever heard one say he wanted to be an arborist?

If you want people to work for you, you have to interest them at an early age. Go out and talk at schools, scout troop meetings, etc. *Spread The Word* (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Favorable publicity is easy to arrange. An Arbor Day Program such as this one sponsored jointly by the Long Island Arborist Association and the International Society of Arboriculture, New York Arborists is a good example.

Women. In the 1800's Sam Colt's 45 was referred to as the "equalizer." In the 1980's we also have equalizers. In the tree business they are: bucket trucks, plastic hose and electric reels, 15 pound chain saws, and brush chippers.

A chain saw can only cut so fast, it makes no difference is the saw is being held by a 170 pound man or a 125 pound woman. Give them a chance,

you'll be pleasantly surprised (Fig. 4). Many arborists who have hired women have reported that they are more conscientious and easier on equipment.

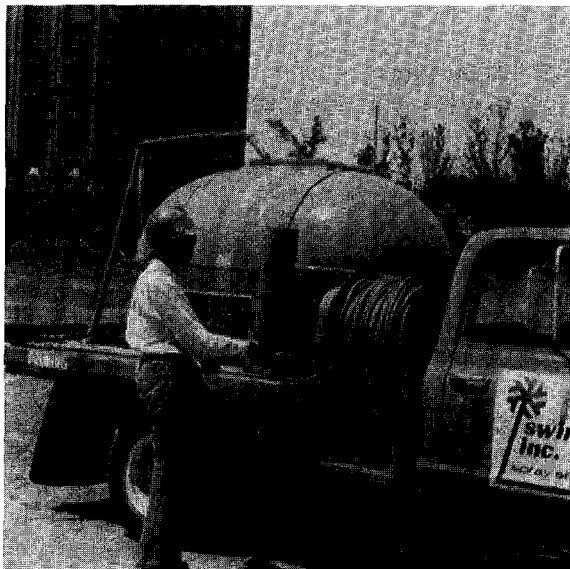


Fig. 4. Many companies report that women make excellent workers. Some companies start women on spray trucks and then work them into tree crews.

Competition. The arborist industry must be competitive, you can not expect to attract, train, and keep good personnel if you are not willing to pay a living wage. The cost of living is going out of sight. The same expenses that are affecting *your* business and family are also effecting *your* employees.

Study the want ads. You must be competitive.

THINK ABOUT THIS, "The employer generally gets the employee he deserves."

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