

# ISA TEXAS CHAPTER PROPOSED CERTIFICATION PROGRAM<sup>1</sup>

by Sue B. Simpson

Certification or licensing of arborists is being considered by several ISA chapters. The Texas Chapter is working on a Certification Program to offer its members. The following is a discussion of our progress and problems.

Over the last 30 years in Texas, individuals have tried to start licensing programs and local arborist associations but have had little success. With the founding of the Texas Chapter in 1978, there has been more statewide interest in elevating tree care practices. In 1981, our chapter voted to have a special committee look into Certification/Registration/Licensing of arborists, and report their findings at the following chapter convention.

The special committee gathered information on programs from other chapters and states. Laws reviewed were from Alabama, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Bismarck, North Dakota, Denver, Colorado, McPherson, Kansas, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Voluntary certification programs reviewed were from the Kansas Arborist Association, Massachusetts Arborist Association, New York Chapter, Penn-Del Chapter and the Western Chapter (as information was available).

Licensing was usually by the state or city. The license law was enforced by police or the city forester. Most state laws were not enforced due to a lack of manpower. City ordinances were more effective. Registration was simply listing oneself as an arborist and this was not what we wanted. Certification was usually voluntary testing and accreditation. This is a program that enhances the educational approach of ISA.

After the chapter learned of the different programs, a survey was made through our newsletter of which way the members wanted to handle ar-

borist certification/licensing. A program was then outlined from the survey information. This proposal was revised over the next two years as members worked out the details.

In general the Texas Chapter is against licensing of arborists by the state or mandatory certification of arborists or workers. This is because licensing could encourage exclusion of non-certified workers and would be anti-competitive. Mandatory certification or licensing would increase an arborist's cost to do business. License fees averaged \$20 per year. If a small company had to license ten employees at \$20 per man per year, it would pay \$200 more per year just to operate. However, a company with one thousand tree men would pay \$20,000 more per year, and for what? Buying a license does not guarantee good tree work. Therefore, the committee was directed to develop a voluntary certification program.

A Certification Committee was appointed to work on a certification program. The committee members represented commercial, utility, and municipal arborists, and educators. They were from around the state. Their united work produced a general program that would be good for all arborists.

There are two meanings for certification. Certification of (1) knowledge or (2) standard of work. Certification can be for one or both. The Texas Chapter chose not to certify standards of work because of possible liability from certified members and the unenforceability of most programs reviewed. The program we developed certifies the recipient's knowledge of the subject.

Our certification is available to the entire Texas Chapter. We recognize a need for increased awareness in all speciality areas of arboriculture. A Texas Chapter Certified Arborist will have a well

1. Presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Arboriculture in Quebec City, Canada in August 1984.

rounded working knowledge of arboriculture. The program will be designed to test experience as well as knowledge of professional standards.

Information pamphlets and reference lists for study will be available. Some study guides are available now. We plan to use current ISA books on municipal standards, transplanting, and evaluation. With permission we may use the National Arborist Association STANDARDS and American National Standards Institute codes for work.

Texas Chapter Certification is recommended only for people who need recognition as a specialist in handling trees. Arborists that sell tree care, diagnose problems, or direct crews need credentials of leadership. Our certification is designed for Texas Chapter members. Certification of all crew members is not our goal.

Certification is voluntary; it is not a requirement for membership in the Texas Chapter. With certification an individual can gain special recognition for knowledge and work with trees.

Certification is to the individual, not a company. This program should not increase a company's cost to do business. The individual is tested and personally maintains his certification.

In the Texas program there is the ISA Texas Chapter Certified *Tree Worker* and the ISA Texas Chapter Certified *Arborist*. The *Tree Worker* certification will honor the knowledge of proper tree care practices and techniques. This is for the tree worker/supervisor who has a practical working knowledge of trees. This certification will help a good tree man to be certified now and give him time to study and investigate involved diagnostic tree problems. *Tree Worker* certification is useful to the small commercial companies in which the owner/ salesman also works with the crew. Knowledge of tree work standards is necessary.

An *Arborist* has specialized knowledge in tree care. *Arborist* certification is for those who design or direct tree work, answer questions and make recommendations concerning trees. It will honor a broad field of knowledge in arboriculture. *Arborist* certification is for tree care salesmen, diagnosticians, and consultants.

The Certification Committee wanted to keep administration of our program simple. We would first establish a permanent Certification Program Committee in our chapter Executive Committee. Then

this committee would include as standing members the chapter Executive Committee and any dues paid member. This would keep the chapter governing body in control of the program.

The Certification Committee decided that the chairman of the Certification Program Committee should be elected and can succeed himself. His duty would be administration of the certification program through his committee. The chairman has no say over who gets certified.

Applicants for certification shall meet the following requirements: ISA Texas Chapter membership; follow ISA Code of Ethics; and pass the Texas tree identification test, and a written exam.

Our requirements for certification are designed to keep the program open to all our members. Since some arborists do not use chemicals, we do not require a pesticide applicators license. We do not make proof of insurance a requirement. We can not be sure that the policy submitted would be current after certification. We might accept some liability by saying an arborist is insured.

Other certification programs we reviewed require some years of experience. Extensive checking of references would be required in order to authenticate this information. Since most checks would then be by phone, we didn't want to bother to require this questionable and time consuming practice.

The Certification Committee wanted this committee program to pay for itself and not to require chapter money. Fees will pay for test materials, study guides, and program information. The *Tree Worker* certification will cost \$50. The *Arborist* certification will cost \$100. There will be no annual dues. Certification is maintained by performing correspondence work, or attending one ISA Convention or workshop per year, or by staying a Texas Chapter member.

Subscription to a Certification Newsletter will be available to all chapter members. It is a publication that helps prepare members for certification, keeps us informed on certification standards, lists certified members, and announces test dates. The subscription pays for the Certification Newsletter and supports the certification program.

For the certification exam, the chapter committees of commercial, municipal, and utility arborists

will help write the test so their specialty area will be fairly covered. The key to this kind of certification will be a good test on current professional standards and practices.

A Texas tree identification test will be given first using samples, diagrams, color plates or slides. To continue the examination, you must pass this test. This will help avoid certifying unqualified applicants who do not know their trees. Because Texas has many tree species, a workshop may be held prior to this test to familiarize applicants with trees from all areas of Texas.

In order to make the preliminary tree identification test available, the Certification Program Committee will give the test at each Executive Committee meeting held around the state. It will then give the written exam at each annual convention.

The written exam will be questions with multiple choice answers supplemented by diagrams, samples or color plates. To pass, correctly answer 70% of the questions.

A Certified Tree Worker will be tested on: safety, electrical wires, tools and equipment, pruning, removals, scar repair and cavity work, structural repair, and the ISA Code of Ethics. Safety and equipment testing should consider that many small firms do not have stump grinders, bucket trucks, or even chippers. Information pamphlets will be necessary to facilitate some testing.

A Certified Arborist will be tested on: the Tree Worker subjects listed above, and further tree identification, common tree problems and treatment which will cover insects, disease, man-made trouble, soils, and natural disasters, girdling roots and base work, stump removal, right of way laws, homeowner rights and responsibilities, lightning protection, nutrients and feeding, chemicals and applications, tree planting and moving, tree selection and growth habit, construction around trees, venting, and gas damage.

The Certification Committee deleted the Enforcements and Penalties section because this was not needed. Article VI, Termination of Membership, of our chapter by-laws will handle misconduct. It says *Any member may be suspended or membership terminated for just cause...Such suspension or termination shall be by two-thirds vote of the Executive Committee and, after due notice, an opportunity of a hearing.*

We will not try to control the quality of work performed by a Certified Tree Worker or Arborist. Good tree work standards are difficult to enforce. Laws and specifications are often disregarded. Our chapter wants to avoid accepting liability for work done by certified members. However, we **can** promote proper tree care and make the public aware competent arborists are available.

There are several benefits of certification. First the applicant receives recognition for achievement in arboriculture. We can then promote and advertise ourselves as Certified. The Certification Program Committee shall have up-to-date certification lists available to the public for confirmation. This program will upgrade the status of our profession. Certification helps promote job safety, tree work standards, and public appreciation of arborists.

This certification program was not adopted at our last annual chapter convention. There were questions about the feasibility of administration of the program. There was a general dissent against any regulation of tree work. There were questions of what value was the program if it did not regulate tree work. The program looked like extra work for everyone. A written statement was requested from the attorney who reviewed our program stating we would not be liable for the actions of those who are Certified.

Critics of this voluntary program say that the governing body of the committee may let the intent change to regulatory action. Another criticism is that some provision for reviewing field skills should be considered, perhaps in conjunction with the annual chapter jamboree. Also, the chapter treasurer may not have time to handle the fees for this program.

Supporters of this program felt it was fair and feasible. An attorney reviewed our program and advised that our intent was right. We were avoiding liability and bias against any members.

With certification of arborists, ISA and the Texas Chapter would be promoting professional competence in arboriculture. We are provided with current tree research information through the ISA Journal and the annual conferences. Now we are going to recognize our society members who are knowledgeable in arboriculture.

As for legislation and licensing in the future, our

members feel that as an educational and scientific research society, we should not initiate political involvement of our Society for regulation of our industry. We do not need government to increase our costs and to tell us how to do our jobs.

The public is uneducated in tree care and is unable to appreciate good work. Certification gives status and recognition to arborists. Certification will help give definition to our field of arboriculture in the business world.

Many associations offer credentialing programs that certify individuals who have been tested for

proficiency. Association credentialing enables the public, business, and government to distinguish those who have attained a certain level of competence from those who have not.

Certification provides prestige and credibility. Although this program will not eradicate poor tree work, I support its efforts to upgrade the status of our profession.

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## ABSTRACTS

CHAPMAN, D.J. 1984. **Street trees.** *Am. Nurseryman* 159(9): 115-116, 118-120.

There are many shade trees that adapt well as street trees, but some are rarely used. There are four important criteria for selecting street trees: 1) no species should comprise more than 5 percent of the city's tree population, 2) the backbone of any good street tree program is native trees, 3) trees chosen should adapt well to extremes, such as low oxygen or wet soils, and 4) there is no such thing as a bad or weed tree. Remember, street trees grow in disturbed, harsh conditions. Many great urban centers were developed along rivers or bodies of water, and the prevailing soils are often heavy clay and low in oxygen. Furthermore, as population density increases, the trees are subjected to additional stresses.

HAMILTON, W.D. 1984. **Sidewalk/curb-breaking tree roots. I. Why tree roots cause pavement problems.** *Arboricultural Journal* 8: 37-44.

Landscape trees are commonly planted in the narrow strip between the curb and sidewalk. Frequently soil is compacted when curbs and sidewalks are installed. Turf and other frequently irrigated plants are also a usual part of the installation; all of which appears to favor surface rooting of the street tree. Problems of breaking sidewalk and curbs due to the proximity of tree roots is a common occurrence, especially in the close confines of urban settings. Half of the claims against a city can be from root-caused problems. The time for the problem to occur and reoccur can be short. One survey in the San Francisco area indicates ten trees, which are most often cited as root-problem trees. Where roots originate, how and where they develop, and why they grow in the proximity of pavement, are discussed.