

FEATURES

Community Collaboration

by Jenan Jones Benson

Program brings opportunities for tree care firms

Looking for a new way to distinguish your company from the pack? Some tree care firms say teaming up with the Tree City USA program is a good opportunity that benefits your business, as well as your community.

What is Tree City USA?

The Arbor Day Foundation (www.arborday.org) partners with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters to support urban and community forestry in municipalities. The Tree City program offers direction, technical assistance, public relations tools and national recognition for the 3,310 communities now involved. It aids in establishing action plans, education and public awareness, and involvement. A similar program exists for college campuses.

Gordon Mann is a consulting arborist in Auburn, Calif., who first worked with the Tree City effort in 1978. He says the program's benefits are countless, aiding tree lovers and professionals in improving appreciation, care and maintenance in their locales.

"The Tree City USA program is vital to help create awareness in people," adds Marty Shaw, president of Happy Tree, Inc. in Franklin, Tenn. "We have forgotten the vital role that trees contribute. Our quality of life is dependent on trees, and our city trees are dependent on us to recognize their value and to take action to promote and preserve them."

Photo Courtesy of Tree Solutions, Inc.



Qualifying for designation

To be designated as a Tree City USA community, a municipality must meet four program standards that ensure basic tree management plans are in place. The guidelines are structured to accommodate the needs of both small and large cities.

Participating cities must have a tree care team in place that is legally responsible for tree management. That team may be a professional arborist or forester, a forestry department or a volunteer board. The Arbor Day Foundation suggests a combination of professionals and voluntary advisors.

A community must also have a tree care ordinance on the books that authorizes the care team to create and implement an annual community forestry work plan. The ordinance should outline standards for planting, maintaining and removing trees from streets, parks and other public places.

The forestry program must have an annual budget of no less than \$2 per capita. Achieving



Scott Baker of Tree Solutions, Inc. in Seattle teaches proper planting procedures.

Photos Courtesy of Happy Tree, Inc. Unless Otherwise Noted.



Proper tree care instruction is a goal of Tree City USA. The mower damage here that will require the tree's removal could have been prevented through education and/or mulching.



Marty Shaw of Happy Tree, Inc. in Franklin, Tenn., helped preserve a 120-foot-tall chinkapin oak on a new development in Belle Meade, Tenn.

that funding level may require education to enlist the support of governmental officials and the public. The foundation suggests a tree inventory and report to the appropriate body. A work plan, detailing species diversity, planting needs, hazardous trees, insect and disease problems, and a system for regular maintenance, such as pruning and watering, should be included.

Lastly, Tree City USA applicants must conduct an Arbor Day event, which can be a simple award ceremony, a tree planting, communitywide festival, educational workshop or any number of related programs. Mann says that recognizing public officials is key in winning support and paving the way for consistent funding.

Moving beyond

Mann cautions that Tree City basic requirements are just a beginning; a top-notch program involves a deeper commitment. To encourage continued and increased dedication to tree care, the foundation offers recognition beyond the initial program qualification. Growth awards may be earned for achievements accomplished beyond the standard annual recertification; 523 communities qualified in 2008 by implementing new program components.

Points are awarded in four categories. In the public relations and education realm, cities publish and distribute informational materials, conduct interpretative events, such as tree tours, and hold recognition ceremonies. Education for youth, foresters and other tree care workers also are encouraged.

Partnership expansion is the next growth level. Cities enlarge their teams by pairing with corporate and volunteer groups, utilities and green industry businesses. Other partnerships with neighboring communities and outside funding sources help extend resources. Relationships with land use management and wildfire prevention groups also qualify for the award.

In the area of planning and management, communities seek to strengthen their programs by expanding maintenance budgets, engaging new or additional staff and improving the entire tree care system. Participants may conduct tree inventories, establish computerized tracking, and upgrade ordinances and standards. An activity supported by many tree care

professionals is a new or enhanced licensing system for the industry.

Lastly, growth awards can be earned through planting and maintenance programs. Projects may be aimed at reducing tree damage caused by improper care methods; other focuses include recycling and street planting and pruning. Hazard and preservation programs also qualify.

Application forms, supporting documents and samples for all Tree City designations are available on the foundation's Web site. Program supplies, including signage and clothing, can be ordered online.

Benefits for you

Given the challenging economic climate and ongoing labor difficulties in many areas, taking on a Tree City project may seem daunting, but participating companies say the payoff can be substantial.

Working with Tree City communities offers a valuable public awareness tool. Serving as an Arbor Day celebration sponsor can be a vehicle for recruiting new clients. In addition, involvement can give you a say in public policy affecting the industry.

"Professional tree care companies need to focus and concentrate more on young tree care and tree planting, and this is a great forum for that," Mann says. "They can lead in [planting] the right tree in the right place and proper young tree care standards and maintenance practices."

Volunteering in some capacity can lead to contracts for consulting and/or services for municipalities. Jenny Gulick, a consulting urban forester with The Davey Tree Expert Company's Davey Resource Group (www.davey.com) in Cincinnati, spends a portion of her workday coordinating activities with Tree City communities.

"That's everything from helping them complete their applications each year to performing work that ultimately helps them qualify and meet the four major requirements," she adds. For example, Davey performed a public tree inventory for the village of Glendale, Ohio, which allowed the town to receive a growth award.

"Since we work for Tree City communities, we benefit by establishing close professional relationships with public employees and the citizens," Gulick says. "Our name recognition in the community has inspired confidence and trust in our clients who end up being repeat customers."

In Seattle, Scott Baker's Tree Solutions (www.treesolutions.net) consults with the town of Hunts Point and provides planting services in Seattle. Baker, a registered consulting arborist, also helped draft tree code revisions and conducted educational workshops.

"Get on board [with Tree City communities]," he adds. "Tree plantings are great advertising."

Whether your company seeks new residential or commercial clients, sees the need to establish or improve the local tree-related policies, or simply wants to increase its community involvement, working with the Tree City program offers an all-in-one vehicle for attaining those goals.

"Community foresters need support from the community, and tree companies are part of the community," says Mann, owner of Mann Made Resources (www.mannandtrees.com). "This program offers opportunities to support and advocate for the tree ordinance, participate on the tree committee and advocate for the tree maintenance program budget."

Based in Greensboro, N.C., the author writes articles about horticulture, landscaping, agriculture and travel. She has been a contributor to Moose River Media publications for three years.

