

Scott Baker likes going out on a limb

■ *Tree consultants today still use chain saws, but some also use ultrasound and other high-tech gadgets in their work.*

By **ANNIE MARTIN**
Journal Staff Reporter

Scott Baker spent much of his childhood climbing trees and he is still at it decades later with his own tree consulting business, Tree Solutions, in Seattle.

Baker is a registered consulting arborist (one of only five in Washington state) and knows a lot about trees, but he says people are really the key to his work.

"You might think I deal with trees but I really deal with people" Baker said. "We look at a lot of factors besides the tree. One of the big ones is people."

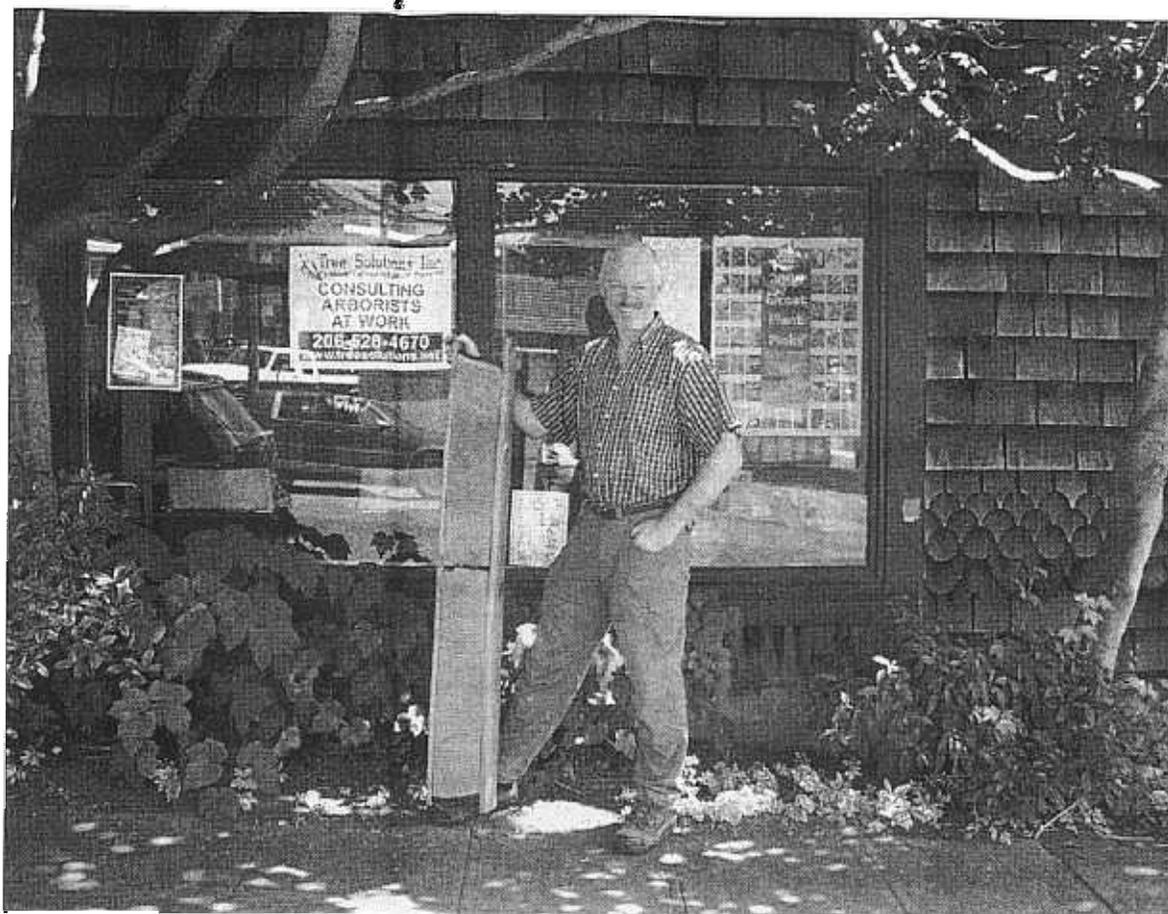
His work involves everything from education about proper tree maintenance to advising clients about whether to remove a potentially hazardous tree. He also diagnoses tree troubles and helps clients care for ailing trees.

Tree Solutions, which has annual revenues of approximately \$300,000, serves a range of clients, including residential and commercial property owners and managers, architects, Realtors, lawyers, insurance companies, municipalities, recreational property managers, developers, schools and contractors.

Helping resolve disputes between neighbors is also part of his job. Approximately 30 percent of his jobs involve lawyers in conflicts such as cutting down trees that block views or encroach on someone else's property.

"You wonder if people ever learned about being polite and being good neighbors," Baker said. "Because trees don't respect property lines, where you plant them is important."

Baker's interest in trees began as a child in New York watching tree sprayers and trimmers. He attended camp in Vermont where he learned about northeastern trees and became interested in environmental science. After attending Evergreen State Col-



Scott Baker's Seattle company keeps him busy climbing trees, diagnosing their ailments, teaching people about how to keep trees healthy.

Photo by Annie Martin

lege in Olympia, Baker got into tree care when a friend started a business in 1979.

Even while Baker strayed from arboriculture into property development on Orcas Island, his interest in trees stayed strong. When he returned to Seattle and needed a job, he asked a college friend, Dorothy Landeen, to help him start a business.

"I really wouldn't have a business without Dorothy," Baker said. "I'm a tree person. I'm not much of a money chaser."

Baker quickly discovered the arboriculture business was not the same as when he left it: "I realized computers had changed the whole world of science."

But Baker not only adapted to technology, he embraced it. He said he brought the first ultrasonic decay detector to the United States, giving arborists an easy



For fun, Baker likes to attend tree climbing events such as the one in southern Oregon. Here he is on a portable ledge 180 feet up in a giant sugar pine.

Photo courtesy Scott Baker

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way to measure tree decay. He also was one of the first arborists to own a resistograph, which measures wood strength, and has helped the German firm IML market the device.

Baker has worked with several renowned tree experts and is especially interested in developing non-invasive methods of analyzing tree stability. He has been trained to use the Statistics Integrated Method, an engineering-based test that assesses a tree's root stability and the likelihood of decay that would cause breakage.

With the help of Phillip van Wassenaer, the only consultant in North America currently equipped to perform the test, Baker tested the root stability of three elm trees at the University of Washington and Merrill Gardens.

"We still have chain saws but now we also have more sophisticated methods," Baker said. "And we still climb trees."

One of the biggest problems Baker sees is improper pruning. Some pruning is okay, but it can damage trees if not done properly. "Tree pruning is for people not for trees," Baker said.

Another problem Baker runs into are cheap, mass-produced trees.

"About 80 percent of the trees I saw are poor products or have been poorly planted," Baker said. "We're a consumer society so plants and gardens have become products."

PlantAmnesty founder Cass Turnbull said she appreciates Baker's determination to make

a difference. Baker saved an old elm tree on the Ballard High School campus, Turnbull said. The school wanted to take the tree out during the remodel but ended up building around it and the tree still stands today, largely because of Baker's efforts, she said.

"He has an outgoing personality and can relay complex information to the public without simplifying it," Turnbull said.

Rick Klum, president of North Crest Development, said he's worked with Baker on several residential projects that have involved tree surveys, tree retention plans and assessing the condition of trees.

"He's a real likeable guy and very professional," Klum said. "He has a keen sense for both sides in a situation and he's very easy to work with."

Landscape architect Susan Black, president of Susan Black and Associates, has worked with Baker on a variety of projects including ones at Woodland Park, Fort Lewis and an urban forest plan for the city of Renton. Black said he's very knowledgeable about tree structure and interested in the way each tree grows.

"He's straightforward and tells it like it is," Black said.

Landeen said Baker was known as "the professor" in college because he knew so much and was eager to share it. Landeen describes him as a "crusader for the environment" because he does so much public speaking and training.

"One of his mottoes is: any time you get a chance to rock the boat, you should jump up and down," Landeen said.