

Utility Arborist Newsline

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INSIDE

President's Message4
 Exec. Director Comments6
 Industry News8
 Spotlight: Environment.....12
 Research Corner16

FOCUS ON WORKFORCE RETENTION

Utility Impacts on Workforce
Retention: 2019 UVM
Summit1
 Getting Started: Workforce
Retention Task Force18
 Collegiate Connections21
 Keeping Up With the Market
& Addressing the Crisis
of Worker Retention and
Turnover24
 The Importance of Cross-
Functional Partnerships..27
 Successful Workforce
Retention Programs.....32
 Georgia Power: Scholarships
& Internships36
 Workforce Retention40
 Tree Worker Shortages and
the Impact of SB 247 in
California42

PHOTO: BY PAULA PAULSEN - PIXABAY



Utility Impacts on Workforce Retention *Lessons Learned From 2019 UVM Summit*

By Sara M. Sankowich, Manager, Forestry Operations and Sustainability, Unitol; Emily S. Kramer, Manager of VM, ComEd; and Heather Green, Program Manager of Vegetation and Inspections, Liberty Utilities

In April of 2019, in Charlotte, North Carolina, more than 50 utility vegetation managers met to discuss a few important components of workforce retention from the utility’s perspective. During the three-day summit, presentations, panel discussions, and survey results were discussed extensively in breakout groups to learn more about our workforce, the workplace culture, and the utility effect on retention.

When the summit committee decided on the topic “Utility Impacts on Workforce Retention,” the committee members knew the contractors that supply the workforce had to be asked for their input. The committee engaged with a third-party consultant to develop and administer the survey, which provided confidentiality to the contractors that were asked to participate. The executive leadership of 27 companies were invited to participate. The committee wanted the large, national companies as well as the mid-size and regional companies, and used committee members’ breadth of industry knowledge and relationships to encourage participation. Responses were received from 12 companies, though for some of the more detailed questions, full

FOCUS ON WORKFORCE RETENTION

responses were not provided. The committee shared all the responses at the summit to open up the conversation, but had to be conscious that some information was limited and could not use all the survey results as scientific representation of the industry. The questions on the survey ranged from big picture (Why are employees leaving? What can utilities do about it?) to detailed (turnover rates by position and pay rate). Contractors were also asked about the impact on safety and any training being performed.

Based on the survey, the most common reason employees are leaving the company or the industry is “opportunity for higher pay,” followed by “desire for less travel” and “dissatisfaction with their work.” Contractors believe utilities can help stabilize the workforce and reduce attrition by paying attention to the length of the contract and allowing for annual cost of living increases. Fifty percent of survey participants ranked contract length as #1 or #2; however, there was not consensus on the ideal contract length. All survey participants believe that high turnover influences safety, and some of the reasons why are due to time spent training, the disruption to crews,



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(Continued from page 1)

and the safety culture new employees are bringing into the industry. Survey participants also provided some verbatim responses that indicated that the safety of the line clearance arborist is a positive aspect and that safety culture helps retain employees.

The survey review kicked off the summit and many of the subjects that arose in the survey transcended throughout the remaining speakers, panelists, and breakout discussion talks. There were several major themes that emanated from the summit: stability, respect and value, and professionalism.

Stability of work volume, a stable budget, and consistent communication were the top drivers of workforce retention. This theme first emerged during the review of the survey results, relating to questions around contract strategy, where length of contract was listed as most important, with three years or greater being the preferred length. Regarding contract strategy type, survey comments indicated that consistent, stable communication surrounding future work volume and budget were a key component of any contract strategy method.

The theme of stability arose again during the breakout discussion regarding key performance indicators (KPIs). Several breakout groups identified KPIs as a tool to allow contractors increased stability (such as an extended contract length or fixed volume of work annually) as an area of opportunity that may limit negative utility effects on workforce retention. Also, clearly defined KPIs with defined key objectives, goals, and measured progress toward targets were also listed as drivers to improving contract stability, and thus,

“A professionally managed and executed vegetation management (VM) program attracts and retains top talent in the industry. Consistency and professionalism are paramount to a successful safety culture which in return leads to workforce retention and satisfaction.”

and more specifically, the supervisors and line workers from the utility companies. In the breakout discussion following, the summit attendees recognized that a significant driver of being respected by the utility was being recognized as a professional with all their skills and training accomplishments. It is important for all workers to find value in what they do and be recognized as providing value to their utility.

Through panel speaker and breakout session discussions, the thought arose that value and respect come from workplace culture, which is composed of many layers of important relationships. It includes the culture of the individual crew, the extended crew of the supervisor, and the tree care company as a whole. It

workforce retention. The themes of respect for the workers and the value they bring, along with professionalism, arose throughout the summit, kicked off by a presentation from Annie Fletcher at Duke Energy. In an anonymous survey to field crews, she asked about their job satisfaction and what it would take to make them stay or leave their jobs. She found the most common driver for line clearance arborist job satisfaction was respect from the utility companies,

also includes the culture of the host utility. These varied cultures can work together or against each other. However, they all can work together to present a sense of the best workplace culture, and be aware of their (positive or negative) input to the culture. These relationships, as well as safety culture, are key components of retaining arborists. When a utility can work with the tree care company and field crews to acknowledge good work and work through field errors with respectful discussion and learning opportunities, instead of purely punitive measures, they are more likely to stay as their work is valued.

In almost every single aspect of the summit, the concept of displaying professionalism or being regarded as a professional in an important industry was a large driver of workforce retention. A comment from the survey read:

“A professionally managed and executed vegetation management (VM) program attracts and retains top talent in the industry. Consistency and professionalism are paramount to a successful safety culture which in return leads to workforce retention and satisfaction.”

Discussions about professionalism tied directly to discussions about training and certifications as a way to add to the professionalism and marketability of the line clearance arborist profession. Brad Daley from



(Continued from page 3)

New Brunswick Power spoke about a joint arborist training program with a local college of Forest Technology. The goals were to provide training to build value, credibility, professionalism, pride, and safety into the utility arboriculture trade. After a two-year investment, graduates received a utility arborist certification and were hired by the utility or a contractor

company. This, in the end, provides respect and value for both the employee and employer. It sets the potential for good workplace culture, high value and professionalism, and low turnover. The UAA is looking at ways to replicate or learn from this training in order to improve professionalism.

Learning about the utility effects and influences on workforce retention is a start to improving workforce

retention for line clearance utility arborists. There are important principles of stability, value, respect, and professionalism to keep in mind as VM programs are crafted and relationships are shaped. However, there are many players and forces needed to drive positive change, with the utility as only one. Partnerships and a broad-based effort, such as the UAA Task Force on Workforce Retention, can help craft a positive future for the utility VM (UVM) industry.



President's Message

By Eric Brown

UVM across North America has been experiencing increased employee turnover.

In speaking with many executives and senior leaders, it is clear that workforce challenges are a critical issue that the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry faces, especially with the exceptional economy we are seeing in the U.S. These are often related to opportunities for higher pay (competition with other trades) and desire for less travel (stability). These key areas are opportunities that we as an industry can impact in a positive way with a little focus and targeted actions. Attracting and retaining good quality employees can simply be a function of competitive wages and stability in contracts. Utility managers have the ability to provide guidance and direction in partnership with their sourcing/procurement teams to ensure that UVM maintenance contracts are three to five years in length. This will provide the stability for all parties involved (qualified line clearance tree workers, pre-inspectors, planners, contractor companies, consultant companies, and utilities), which reduces the disruption and challenges associated with contract change-outs as well as all the associated, generally unproductive—not to mention costly—onboarding and offboarding during these events.

I have heard and faced similar challenges in my program in the last few years with a shrinking UVM workforce and general workforce retention issues across North America. The workforce retention challenge is acting as a “brake” in many UVM programs and impacting work completion, especially slowing growth of new, forward-thinking work practice efforts (targeted specialized reliability, enhanced

wildfire risk, and advanced storm hardening). I appreciate the workforce retention focus on the UVM industry out west—specifically, California’s governor, who recently (Q4 2019) signed SB 247, which, among other requirements, has essentially aligned line clearance qualified tree workers’ compensation and benefits with the apprentice line construction side of the utility workforce. This will have sweeping impacts across the UVM industry west of the Rockies and likely across North America with time.

With that said, many UVM programs have a “Planning/Pre-Inspection” function that is a critical path to identifying, listing, notifying, and quality-controlling the UVM work. For this traditional UVM model to be successful, we also must provide a complementary focus on attracting, training, and retaining high-quality personnel for these team members. Advertising and marketing can be bolstered by the UAA across North America to showcase that the UVM industry has solid, long-lasting career paths that stand the test of catastrophic weather events, natural disasters, and even long-lasting economic downturns. We must look broadly across the VM industry and benchmark wages with state agencies, counties, and city programs that have similar VM functions to better align wages across these work groups.

The UAA and its members have been laser focused and working diligently on the challenge of attracting, training, and retaining UVM workers. In April/May 2019, the UAA’s Annual Vegetation Managers Summit focused on this topic. They also recently (Q3 2019) “doubled down” with targeted emphasis on both the line clearance qualified tree worker training and the Professional Utility Vegetation Manager (PUVM) program. Both efforts are being led by the UAA and UVM subject matter experts (SMEs) and supported by utilities and academia professionals to ensure we have appropriate curriculum and programs in place to support long-term success that can be duplicated across North America. I would expect to hear more about both of these efforts in early 2020, and especially at the Trees and Utilities Annual Conference in Milwaukee Wisconsin.

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Executive Director Comments

By Phil Charlton

When the UAA first formed the Workforce Retention Task

Force, everyone was overwhelmed by the response. In fact, the leadership of the task force had to hold meetings to figure out how to hold meetings—there were so many people interested in participating that it required a lot of thought to organize the effort in the best way. With the leadership of Jordan Jozak (Tree Care of NY), the team is off and running. They will be looking at opportunities for the UAA to work on the challenges which dominate much of the conversation in our industry.

While they begin their work, the UAA continues the initiatives already underway. I have shared information on the two educational programs that have been in development and we anticipate students entering both programs by the end of April. Here is the latest news on the Utility Vegetation Management (UVM) Professional Development Program (PDP) and the Qualified Line Clearance Tree Worker Training Program (TWT).

UVM PDP

Development of the PDP was first initiated by the UVM Association (UVMA). The UAA partnered with UVMA in the development of a college-level program offered online and for the purpose of providing candidates an expedited opportunity to obtain an advanced level of knowledge and skill that may normally take an individual 10–15 years on the job to gain as a result of several roles. It will also extend the career path of front-line field workers by equipping them to transition to management. Providing a viable career path is essential to improving retention.

The PDP was piloted at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). Twenty graduates now qualify for the UAA Professional certification (in development). It has been interesting to see how many of the graduates have been recognized for their accomplishment and how their careers have progressed.

UVM Professional Development Program

Course #1 - Introduction to UVM

Introduction to the UVM Industry, North American Electrical Systems, and Utility Arboricultural Principles

Course #2 - UVM Program Management Fundamentals

Introduction to Leadership and Management, Organizational Management, Program and Project Management, and Integrated VM

Course #3 - UVM Compliance and Stakeholder Management

Includes UVM Integrated Management as well as Compliance, Stakeholder, Communications, and Records Management

Course #4 - UVM Scope, Cost, and Procurement Management

Includes UVM Scope Management, Resource Management, Time (Schedule) Management, Cost (Financial) Management, and Procurement (Contract) Management

Course #5 - UVM Safety, Risk, and Quality Management

Includes UVM Safety Management, Risk Management, and Quality Management

Course #6 - UVM Program Planning

Final Project and Presentation (measure of all competencies)

Beginning in April 2020, the PDP will be offered as a non-credit, online course by the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point. Students will receive a certificate of completion from the university as they complete each course. Students completing all courses will be eligible to apply for the professional certification. It's exciting to see five years of work entering this new phase.

Qualified Line Clearance Tree Worker Training Program (TWT)

There is also a tremendous need for more and better-trained workers. Last fall, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) challenged the UAA and Butte College to partner in the development of the Qualified Line Clearance TWT program. They wanted to have more than 2,000 new individuals in training by late 2020. I don't know if we will get to 2,000,

but we will be on our way by April when the first trainees enter the program.

The UAA's partnership with Butte College has been great. Larry Abernathy has led the way on behalf of the UAA. Annie Rafferty has been the leader for Butte College. We have been assisted by New Brunswick Power; the Ontario College of the Trades; many contractors, consultants, and vendors working in California; the IBEW; and several of the utilities.

The 240-hour training program will have eight modules:

1. Introduction to being a "Utility Line Clearance Arborist"
2. General Safety Requirements
3. Safe Use of Portable Tools, Hand Tools, and Ladders
4. Electrical Hazards and Identification
5. Safe Use of Mobile Equipment
6. Safe Tree Climbing and Work Activities - Part 1
7. Safe Tree Climbing and Work Activities - Part 2
8. Customer Relations and Communications

Butte College has engaged community colleges throughout California so the TWT program can be offered where the candidate pool and resource needs are located. The goal is that by the end of the year, this template can be used by colleges throughout the U.S.

An interesting benefit of this strategy is that the community colleges won't just be delivering the course; they will be actively engaged in recruitment. Perhaps with the help of the colleges, we can start to change the misperceptions about UVM and help more see the benefits of our great industry.

The PDP and the TWT programs are pieces of the puzzle. The UAA's Task Force will be working on others. If you are reading this edition of the *Newsline*, you are likely one of the 5,000+ members that are confronting the problems of recruitment, training, and retention and I encourage you to share your experiences. What's working? What's not? Share it on the UAA's LinkedIn and Facebook pages or submit an article to the *Newsline* editorial team. Networking is the most powerful tool we, as professionals, have.

Industry News

ACRT Promotes David Burke to Director of Operations

ACRT, an independent national vegetation management (VM) consulting firm headquartered in Northeast Ohio and one of four brands under parent company ACRT Services, is pleased to announce the promotion of David Burke to the position of director of operations.



David Burke

Burke began his ACRT career in 2004 and has held the role of operations manager since 2012. As operations manager, he was responsible for managing and implementing multiple projects simultaneously. He was responsible for managing both transmission and distribution (T&D) employees for cooperative and investor-owned utilities (IOUs) across multiple states. In total, Burke brings more than 20 years of industry experience to his new role.

“My focus remains on effectively managing my team and continuing to provide exceptional customer service to those in the ACRT community,” Burke said. “I’m looking forward to this new role.”

During his time with ACRT, Burke also served as the employee seat on the board of directors and was the chairman of the safety committee. When not at work, Burke enjoys life on the farm with his wife, two children, and many animals; working with horses; and dabbling in guitar and mandolin. Burke holds a Bachelor’s degree in Natural Resources with a specialization in Forestry from the Ohio State University. Burke is also an ISA-Certified Arborist.

“We’re pleased to see David continue to move forward in his career with ACRT,” said Kevin Puls, president of ACRT. “With his dedication to forestry, learning, and serving our communities, we know he’ll continue to do great things for our organization and customers.”

Bryan Durr Named New Director of Operations for ACRT Pacific

ACRT Pacific, a vegetation management (VM) consulting firm focused exclusively on California utilities and one of four brands under parent company ACRT Services, has named Bryan Durr as the new director of operations.

Durr has excelled in each role he has held within the organization and relocated multiple times to gain valuable experience. He has served as operations manager in Florida and later as business development manager for ACRT’s western territory. Most recently, he worked at a large investor-owned utility as a program manager.



Bryan Durr

In total, Durr has nearly 15 years of experience in the VM industry. He holds an Associate’s degree in Applied Science and Forest Management from the School of Natural Resources at Hocking College. Durr is also an ISA-Certified Arborist and Utility Specialist.

“I’m excited to start my new role as director of operations for ACRT Pacific,” Durr said. “I’m grateful for the many opportunities I’ve been given to grow, and I’m ready to begin the next part of my career.”

In addition to this work for utilities throughout the U.S., Durr also served as an employee board member, chair of the safety committee, advisor to the area safety representatives, and historian of the employee stock ownership program (ESOP) committee.

“Bryan’s work ethic and passion for our organization is undeniable,” said Brian Joiner, president of ACRT Pacific. “We’re pleased to have him continue his career with us as director of operations.”

Durr resides in California with his son and wife, who is also employed with ACRT Pacific and works on VM initiatives for California utilities.

Davey Names Vice President, General Manager for DRG Asset Management

The Davey Tree Expert Company is proud to announce the promotion of Scott Carlin to vice president and general manager, Davey Resource Group (DRG), asset management services.

Carlin joined Davey in 2004 as project developer on the DRG geographic information systems (GIS) team. In 2006, he transitioned to sales and marketing for DRG project development, and in 2009, was named market manager for the division. In 2012, Carlin was promoted to market manager of DRG project development and then division manager in 2015. In 2016, he was promoted to vice president of DRG project

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Scott Carlin

development before transitioning to vice president of asset management services in 2018.

“Every day, Scott approaches projects with an enthusiasm that carries through to his team. As Davey’s clients and projects evolve, Scott’s leadership and dedication to excellence also grows,” said Brent Repenning, executive

vice president, U.S. Utility and DRG. “Scott will continue leading a dynamic, safety-focused team on innovative solutions with a commitment to client service.”

Carlin has a Bachelor’s degree in Finance from the University of Toledo. Carlin has served as chairman of the Heartland Joint Use Consortium, SSE Risk Management Group, and Edison Electric Institute (EEI).

Carlin is a past member of the Davey President’s Council, whose members serve a three-year term on various committees to brainstorm and research new ideas related to the company’s operations.



CNUC Promotes Larsen to Regional Manager

CNUC promoted Patrick Larsen to regional manager, effective mid-January of this year.

Larsen started with CNUC as a lead consulting utility forester (CUF) in 2014, bringing 10 years of industry experience to the company. Throughout his career, he has worked as a pre-apprentice line worker, line clearance tree trimmer, CUF, project manager, and, most recently, regional supervisor. He is also an ISA-Certified Arborist and serves on the UAA professional development committee. As regional manager, Larsen will oversee all operations in the mountain states region.



Patrick Larsen

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our western operations,” said vice president Josh Beaver. “I look forward to many more great achievements from Patrick in his new role.”

Larsen’s promotion is representative of CNCU’s current and future growth in the western U.S.

Davey Names Vice President, General Manager of Eastern Utility Services

The Davey Tree Expert Company is proud to announce the promotion of Mike Mittiga to vice president and general manager, Eastern Utility services.

Mittiga will oversee operations for all aspects of Eastern Utility. He will report to Brent Repenning, executive vice president, U.S. Utility and Davey Resource Group (DRG).

“Mike’s dedication, tenacity, and leadership have earned him a reputation for exceeding client expectations,” Repenning said. “His commitment to diligently building safe, engaged teams is evident in his daily work ethic, and I look forward to his continued success in helping to build the future of Davey’s utility services.”

Mittiga started with Davey in 2006 as a management trainee and was positioned as a groundman/trimmer on the Tampa Electric account. He was quickly promoted to supervisor on the Orlando Utilities Commission account the same year. He earned several more promotions to account manager in 2008, senior account manager in 2012, area manager in 2013, and operations manager in 2015.

In 2016, he assumed the role of vice president, Upper Atlantic Region. In 2018, he was promoted to vice president of operations, Atlantic Region.

Mittiga is an ISA-Certified Arborist and an ISA-Certified Arborist Utility Specialist. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Kent State University.

Mittiga is a past member of the Davey President’s Council, whose members serve a three-year term on various committees to brainstorm and research new ideas related to the company’s operations. He is a 2009 graduate of the Davey Institute of Tree Sciences, Davey’s flagship training program in biological sciences, safety, tree and plant care, and management techniques.



Mike Mittiga



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The Power of Family: Carly Harrower and Zak Jansen, ACRT Pacific

At ACRT Services and our family of companies, we’re exactly that: a family. Many of our employees nationwide are either relatives or married. Wherever their responsibilities take them, their connection keeps them moving forward for the communities we serve.



Carly Harrower and Zak Jansen met at Humboldt State University in California, where they both majored in Forestry and spent college studying trees and the environment. Both had prior experience in related fields such as landscaping and arboriculture, so when Jansen saw an ad for a forestry position, he and Harrower both applied.

Since then, the couple has advanced their respective roles within the company. Harrower has grown from a consulting utility forester (CUF) to operations manager, while Jansen has grown from a CUF to a vegetation program manager and lead user experience specialist.

“It’s a dynamic company with significant opportunity for personal and professional growth,” Harrower said. “It also gives you a chance to serve your community and keep people safe while allowing you the freedom to enjoy the outdoors.”

“ACRT Pacific has never hesitated to encourage and fund my professional development,” Jansen said. “I’ve never felt like I’ve plateaued—there’s constant opportunity to grow. Being employee owned makes for a truly supportive, family-like company.”

When they’re not working, Harrower and Jansen enjoy spending time outdoors with their son, Colter, hiking and fishing, tending to their garden and orchard, and even raising livestock. Learn more about opportunities with ACRT Pacific at careers.acrt.com.



SPOTLIGHT on the Environment



NASA IMAGE

Why Your Story Matters

By Kurt Mann, Director, Mannkind Films

My dad once told me, “You become the story you tell yourself.” I believe this is true. The stories we tell ourselves build our identities and guide our futures. As a documentary filmmaker, I have the awesome privilege and challenge of capturing people’s stories. I strive to turn the reflection of what I’ve seen and heard into short videos (or visual stories) to which we all can relate and aspire.

Two years ago, I began working with the UAA. I was inspired by people in the industry who believe we can deliver energy both safely and reliably to customers while also cultivating wildlife habitat on the millions of acres that make up utility corridors around the world. I was able to walk these forgotten lands and meet the integrated vegetation management (IVM) managers, vegetation crews, biologists, and other industry leaders who are shaping the future of right-of-way (ROW) habitat management. I was also able to meet volunteers and members of the surrounding communities who are benefiting from ROW lands that have literally come to life.

My job as a filmmaker is to understand the stories that are unfolding around us and deliver thought-provoking messages to a range of viewers. Video is a powerful tool that quickly transports viewers to meet experts and watch them work. It is not just informative; it is emotive. ▶

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The Stewards

My personal and professional passions continually lead me to projects related to the environment and human interactions with nature. When the UAA approached me to produce *The Stewards*, the first in a series of short films about environmental stewardship and IVM, I was thrilled. Now, two films later and a third one in the making, I am excited to share my reflections on this enlightening experience.

The Stewards

Working together with FirstEnergy, New York Power Authority, and Vermont Electric Power Company, we featured the history of IVM on ROWs and the powerful role VM plays in creating thriving ecosystems. Following my initial steep learning curve to grasp all that is involved in implementing proper IVM, I have truly become an advocate of IVM practices. I had no idea what was possible in terms of creating habitat on utility corridors, and filming such richly biodiverse ROWs was both beautiful and inspiring.

The potential that ROW managers have for making positive impacts on the landscapes they manage spoke deeply to me. I hope *The Stewards* captures this.

Lifelines

Last year, I had the pleasure to work with AltaLink and Seattle City Light. Together we produced *LifeLines* to tell the story of habitat restoration on utility corridors, particularly aiming to reach audiences outside of the industry. *LifeLines* not only features protective measurements utilities take to conserve habitat on ROWs but also shows collaborative initiatives utilities have with external stakeholders to build additional capacity for environmental stewardship.

We have all seen the headlines about the insect apocalypse. While this dire situation may initially cause alarm, it is my hope that *LifeLines* inspires people to see ROWs as nature's corridors.

Electric Future

This year, I am excited to partner with the UAA on a third video, which has the current working title *Electric Future*. Our target audience is the future generation of ROW managers and vegetation crews who will inherit our mission of ROW care. The film will show how VM fits seamlessly into today's sustainability-oriented society and provides an important opportunity to improve biodiversity. Our hope is that this third video will attract a young and diverse



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workforce with a keen desire to build upon our current IVM practices and continue to drive environmental stewardship.

In the last 30 years, I have traveled to more than 45 countries exploring ways to create the lives we want while also providing the space and resources for ecosystems to thrive. I learned early on that what happens to the smallest of creatures—plants, insects, bacteria—comes back to either help or haunt us. In my filmmaking, I tell stories about people who bring nature back into our lives and invent new ways to meet their needs while ensuring that the natural systems, which ultimately sustain all life on the planet, can do their job. In this way, I believe the utility sector has a lot to share.

It has been an honor to work with the UAA. It is my hope that our work together will continue to inspire the evolution of land management to deliver safe, reliable energy and much needed biodiversity to communities across the country.



Research Corner

RESEARCH STUDIES: TECHNICAL REVIEW



Evaluation of Ash Tree Symptoms Associated with Emerald Ash Borer Infestation in Urban Forests

*This technical summary is based on a peer-reviewed article published in *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry* 2015. 41(2): 103-109, Anand B. Persad and Patrick C. Tobin.*

● Keywords

Agilus planipennis; Arboriculture; Ash; Branch Fracture; Early Detection; Emerald Ash Borer; Fraxinus; Invasive Species; Scaffold Crack; Urban Forestry.

● Challenge

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is a beetle native to Asia which was discovered in North America in 2002. Its negative effects are projected to cost the U.S. \$10 billion USD and EAB threatens to virtually eliminate ash trees from North American forests.

● Main Objectives

While management tactics range from “no action” to “aggressive management,” a barrier to active management remains that EAB can go undetected for years, often until the damage is already done. The objective of this study, therefore, was to see which factors were present in trees recently infested with EAB which could aid in earlier detection.

● Process

Each year from 2009 to 2012, researchers in Northern Ohio conducted a survey to determine symptoms associated with EAB. None of the 719 trees inspected in the four years had previously been treated for EAB. These were also categorized into three groupings by their assumed history of EAB infestations. Researchers noted the characteristics of the trees involved, and then statistical analysis was employed to determine which previously identified factors had a high probability of indicating EAB.

● Conclusion

Such factors as bark loss, scaffold cracks, branch fractures only within the upper one-third of the canopy, fractures near the union with the stem, and >30 percent canopy loss were significantly associated with trees positively identified with EAB.

● Utilities Moving Forward

Early detection measures can help urban foresters and municipal arborists treat trees successfully before the need for removal. Also, removing these trees can prove dangerous, especially given that EAB-infested trees can have unexpected branch failures.

Written by Jenna Paul, Technical Writer, Davey Resource Group, Inc. (DRG) with technical review by Anand Persad.

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Our mission and goal is “to identify contributing factors related to Workforce Recruitment and Retention that have actionable solutions which can be implemented, scaled, and repeated throughout our industry.”

Getting Started: The Workforce Retention Task Force

By Jordan P. Jozak, Business Manager, Tree Care of New York, LLC.; Sara Sankowich, Manager of Forestry Operations and Sustainability, Unilit; and Rebecca Spach, Director of VM, FirstEnergy

For many utility vegetation management (UVM) professionals, our personal career paths have evolved, changed, and grown into something that has impacted our lives beyond what we do on a daily basis. Our entire industry is rich with job opportunities and rewarding career paths based in the utility spectrum and expanding to the contractor’s, but one common issue resonates with all of us, **where are the workers?**

After taking a step back and analyzing the facts of our situation with a broader perspective, it’s clear that the labor shortage stretches far beyond our industry. At the close of 2019, the national unemployment rate held steady at 3.5 percent, the lowest it’s been since 1969. A study in 2018 performed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported that 90 percent of skilled and unskilled labor employers had a “moderate to difficult” time finding new workers. This issue of recruiting new workers is unfortunately only the tip of the iceberg when compared to retaining the ones that are currently in the industry. The

U.S. Department of Labor reported in 2018 that the average age of skilled and unskilled workers is currently 56 years old, leaving them with a time-frame of five to 15 years before retirement. When looking at the facts, the labor crisis appears grim.

This topic has been on the forefront of discussion at many UAA events, and in response, the Workforce Retention Taskforce (WFRT) was formed and held its first meeting in November of 2019. Our mission and goal is “to identify contributing factors related to Workforce Recruitment and Retention that have actionable solutions which can be implemented, scaled, and repeated throughout our industry.”

The taskforce’s membership is made up of nearly 80 utility and contractor professionals from all professional levels and backgrounds throughout the nation. To compartmentalize the overwhelming support this cause has generated, we’ve developed a structure containing five subcommittees: *Recruitment, Retention, Outreach and*

Education, Utility, and Contractor. Each subcommittee has two leaders that report back to a steering committee with Chairman Jordan Jozak, Co-Chairman Sara Sankowich, and UAA Champion Rebecca Spach. Each subcommittee holds a monthly meeting and then collaborates with the steering committee to dive deep into the root causes and potential solutions that have been identified.

So far, the WFRT has been working diligently to solidify its diverse membership and monthly schedule, and the topics of discussion and potential actionable solutions that are being presented have been empowering. The topic of cultivating a rewarding, safe, and exciting employer culture that understands generational changes and responsible hiring practices has been at the top, but the largest focal point thus far has been the discussion of strategies to navigate today’s channels in

promoting our industry and showcasing it as a consistent, rewarding, and viable career path. The task force’s goal is to develop and maintain a UAA standardized best management practices (BMP) solution set for both utilities and contractors alike. Beyond our goal of developing a BMP set, our vision stands to implement a long-term plan where the WFRT can compile, share, and act as a resource for other committees (like the Outreach and Education groups) where the data and solutions compiled can be shared to encourage innovation as the struggles we face evolve.

This issue is not one that a single utility or a single contractor faces; it’s one that impacts our industry in its entirety. With that being said, the endeavor of finding actionable solutions is one that cannot be completed alone. If you’re interested in contributing to the WFRT and learning more, please reach out to the UAA at rphillipsgotouaa.org. Together, we hope to unite and strive to solve one our industry’s largest challenges.



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Collegiate Connections

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By Jenna Paul, Technical Writer, Davey Resource Group

College is an excellent place to explore potential careers and chart a course for the rest of your life. While high school engagement remains a vital aspect of growing the vegetation management (VM) industry, colleges should not be overlooked for positions, managerial or otherwise. Heightening collegiate engagement by providing job listings, guest lectures, and internships for students creates a mutually beneficial relationship. These resources can generate industry interest in an upcoming generation of eager, educated young adults while giving them tools to succeed in their careers. Gregory Dahle, associate professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry at West Virginia University (WVU), shared his experience in the industry as well as a professor and advice for companies wishing to become more involved.

Dahle graduated from Purdue University with his Bachelor's degree in Forestry and Wildlife Management. He started with Davey Resource Group, Inc. (DRG) after a period of temporary positions. He began as an Inventory Arborist and moved into pre- and post-inspection management. The experience taught him about responsibility and revealed his passion for arboriculture. While he knew he would pursue a Master's degree after his undergraduate, he noticed through his five years with DRG that, "while [he] loved wildlife, [he] loved arboriculture more." This realization guided his decision to pursue a Masters in Forestry at Purdue, then a PhD in Arboriculture from Rutgers University.

One potential way companies can reach out to students while providing value is teaching a class as a guest. For Dahle's eight years at WVU, he has been an advocate for arboriculture that strives to provide resources to interested students. Companies providing guest lectures can connect them to potential new hires, and it provides variety and different perspectives for the students. Dahle says, "In my classrooms, I invite as many speakers as I can. I try not to show favoritism, focusing instead on showcasing the full breadth of arboriculture." These guests allow the students to see the potential in this field of study and can help them discover which aspects of the industry appeal to them for their future careers.

Another way is to be involved in local conferences. Keeping the dialogue between utilities, consulting agencies,

and college staff and students alive is vital, and each has value to impart on others. Dahle's advice for maintaining connections is to attend conferences and reach out via e-mail. "It's classic networking," Dahle said. "Local conferences are where I go to reconnect, along with UAA or ISA conferences. That, and recruiters call in or individuals e-mail asking to come in and help with class."

Dahle makes a point of sending out job listings to all his students and encourages recruiters to send them to professors. This helps students see what is available to them in the future and may help them get a position post-graduation. Seth Blair, a former student of Gregory Dahle who earned a degree in Forestry Resources Management, found a summer internship this way that helped pave the way for his future career. Blair explained that when the opportunity became available, Dahle encouraged him to pursue it: "It was a rare chance to try something a little different." Blair did take the summer internship with Dominion Energy, and it opened his eyes to options beyond forestry or commercial work.

Internships and other participatory events help students connect with utility arboriculture in a tangible way. At WVU, forestry students participate in a summer camp which features a full day of integrated VM (IVM). Since this is a required course, it serves as an introduction to IVM that they might not otherwise get. Dahle says that he "takes every opportunity to take students out in the field." Formal internships such as the one Blair took with Dominion offer further depth, but even ride-along experiences can give students a more realistic impression of a day on the job.

WVU also keeps a job list to aid graduates finding their next job long after they've left their alma mater, and keeping this connection can help them with their career throughout life. Blair has stayed on the list, which helps him keep connected with the industry. He has also asked Dahle for advice when looking for a new position, as he "keeps an open door policy" for graduates.

Whether you are a recruiter looking to fill a position or a graduate looking to start your career, keeping in contact with your alma mater and other colleges has something to offer. Creating value for colleges generates interest in students and allows them to explore potential careers. Maintaining a presence in this way allows you to tap into fresh talent while providing them room to flourish.

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Keeping Up With the Market and Addressing the Crisis of Worker Retention and Turnover

By Will Nutter, President and COO, Wright Tree Service

Worker recruitment and retention have been some of the most discussed topics in the industry in the past several years. There have been presentations, panel discussions, articles, and more centered on this topic and how to fix it. Personally, I have had a multitude of discussions about worker retention with peers, customers, competitors, and the industry in general to share our experiences and discuss the labor shortage we are facing.

Recently, California Governor Gavin Newsom weighed in and made sweeping changes in the wage and benefit package for anyone performing line clearance work in California. A new regulation, SB247, allows local unions to negotiate a wage package with a 40 percent or more increased pay for line clearance workers based on entry-level line construction worker wages and compensation. This is one indication that we as an industry are not keeping up with our peer groups. When employees leave our employment for better wages, benefits, or opportunities, we must take a hard look at ourselves.

Many of us are looking for answers, silver bullets, or maybe just a life preserver to help get the work done. While there are maybe no silver bullets, doing the same thing year after year and expecting different results is not a plausible plan either.

When I was asked to present on this at the ISA annual international conference and to facilitate a panel at the

Trees & Utilities conference last year, much of the research showed that we do have a problem with workforce retention. Turnover in our industry is at nearly 50%, and most people leaving the industry are leaving for better pay and less physical work.

The research Annie Fletcher, contract manager at Duke Energy, shared gives a good insight into our field workers. She found that most who left really enjoyed the line of work and it took almost an additional five dollars an hour to get them to leave. When they stayed, they stayed because they liked their supervisor. Likewise, when they left, they left because they dislike their supervisor and they didn't feel the industry was valued as a profession when compared to utility workers or other professional industries.

The feedback the UAA received indicated that many factors impacted turnover: pay, work type (fixed price vs. time and material), contract length, perception on the ability to advance in this industry, supervisor, culture, and tenure to mention a few. Turnover rates for the first-year worker average about 70%, while the turnover rate for those working at a company for five to 15 years fell to 24%. If we can keep new employees past a couple of years, they see the benefit of staying in the industry long-term.

What are we doing about it?

The UAA and Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) have development committees looking for a diversification of our workforce and studying what is working and what

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My New Favorite Day of the Week: Drill Day!



Wednesday at Lewis Tree Service is now Drill Day. On Drill Day, we are creating the space to practice simple tasks that have the potential to cause serious injuries. And, as it turns out, we're having fun in the process. Some of the drills have included a) dropping limbs from heights onto watermelons (with and without hardhats) to see the aftermath firsthand and make risk real, b) racing teams of new vs. experienced crews to set up a drop zone and conducting an After-Action Review to discuss what went well, what didn't, what surprised us, etc., and c) using a branch to estimate felling distance before dropping a small tree—and competing for who is the most accurate.

We're discovering that, in addition to having fun and strengthening team camaraderie, the benefits to Drill Day are many. We are:

- Helping people experience the physicality of their actions and work environments.
- Providing an opportunity for new workers to ask questions and understand the *why* behind our safety practices.
- Working through how to handle variability while learning more effectively that every tree, job site, weather condition, terrain, knowledge base, level of experience, and situation is different.
- Engaging leadership around "work as done" vs. "work as planned" while gaining a better understanding of the drivers that present a difference between the two.
- Discovering gaps in the system.
- Bringing safety and operations close together (not delegating safety).

"These drills are really making an impact. The craft workers are learning—soaking it all in like sponges—and they appreciate the coaching and training. It's awesome to see the teams learn something new to keep them safe and out of the line of fire! It's my new favorite day of the week" said one Safety Specialist at Lewis Tree Service.

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isn't. Wages are increasing to slow turnover and contractors and utilities are jointly working on opportunities to improve retention. Pilot programs to recruit, train, and attract new employees to our industry through conventional and non-conventional paths are increasing daily.

We are not alone. The trucking association claims they are 50,000 drivers short and they are raising compensation by double digits toward an average salary of \$70,000 per year. The commercial construction index indicates a labor shortage that continues to challenge the industry, causing 81% of firms to ask the skilled worker to do more work. Seventy percent of contractors struggle to meet deadlines, 63% increase costs for new work, and 40% reject new projects. The construction industry says a contributing factor to the increased turnover could be the negative perceptions of construction careers for younger workers, leading to fewer workers seeking employment in the industry. When asked about the biggest myths about the trade, 61% of contractors cited the perception that all jobs are "dirty" jobs, 55% said it requires brute strength, and 52% said it's a job, not a career. Does any of this sound familiar?

The challenge of recruiting and retaining employees will not become easier soon. As an industry, let's not do the same thing and expect different results. Let's partner, collaborate, brainstorm, and most of all, not give our current employees a reason to go look for a better-paying, easier job. They just may find one unless we do our part.

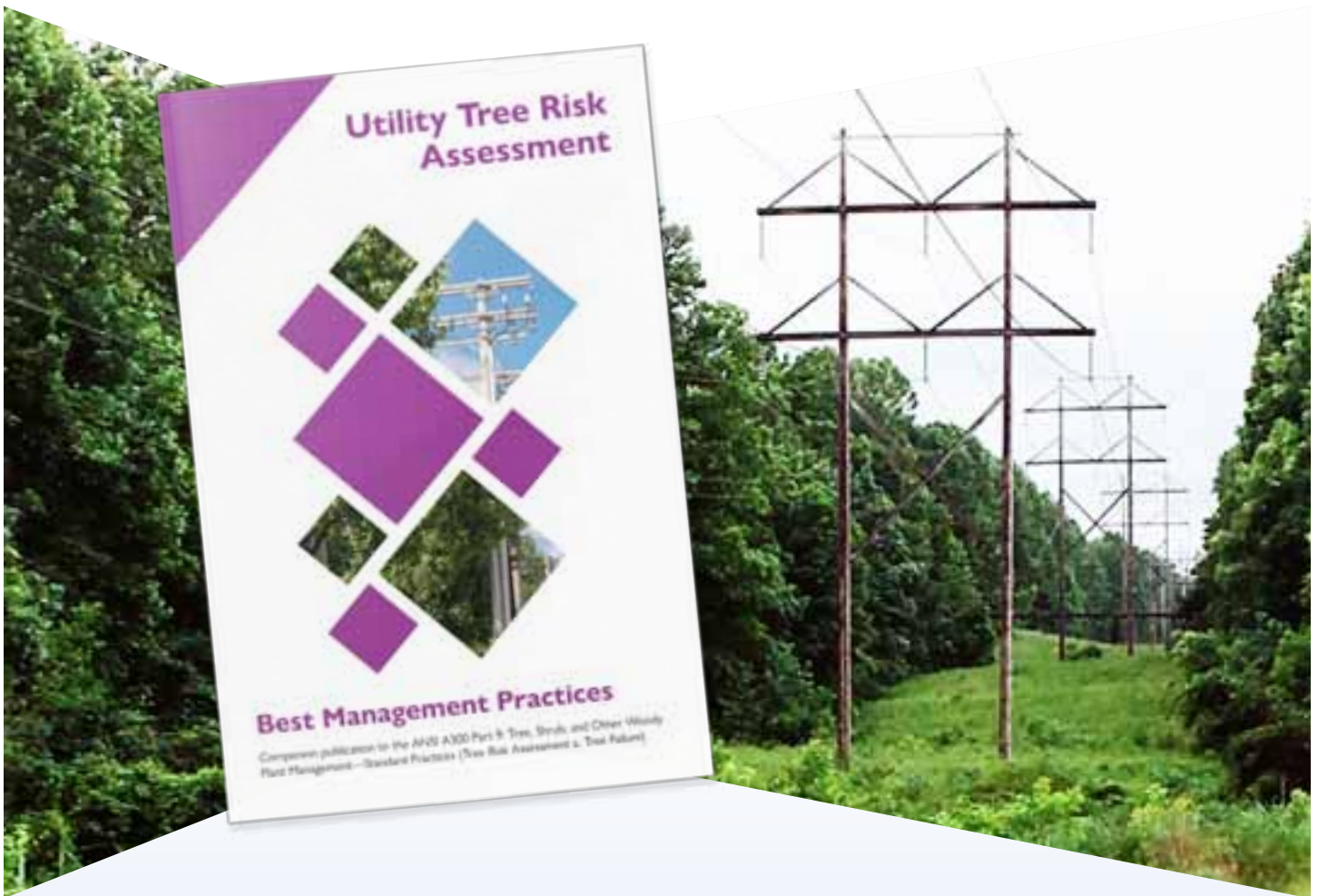
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The Importance of Cross-Functional Partnerships in Attracting and Retaining Talent



By Allie Hartfelder, Director of Human Resources, ACRT Services

Attracting and retaining employees that provide a positive value to the business is key to driving a strong top line, maintaining margins, and creating the innovation necessary to gain (or maintain) market share. As a specialized industry, we have unique challenges in finding and holding onto qualified employees. Turnover of specialized employees creates a larger deficit than other employees because of the additional time required to recruit and develop these roles. Productivity losses not only impact the role being replaced but also the teams working to support these open roles. Team morale and the work environment can be negatively impacted when specialized positions are open for a length of time or when turnover increases in these roles. This can create a cycle of increased turnover that affects productivity for months and quarters instead of weeks. This makes attraction and retention goals an imperative part of every company's annual strategy.

Attracting talent is no longer just a human resource function.

A strong partnership between marketing, operations, and human resources is required to create an engaging workplace where employees feel valued. Leadership must continually evaluate and refine processes to support a workplace that, when honestly reflected in your employee branding, attracts talent. Candidates in today's market have options for employment and more access to current and previous employee feedback than in past decades. While marketing is placing

media across channels to get your company's name in front of candidates amid a flurry of information, the brand must provide a realistic preview of what the role will look like for that candidate. Will they be able to move within the organization? How will the medical benefits support them in their current life stages? How does the culture align with the candidates' work styles and personal goals? The company's brand image, or the beliefs and impressions people have of the company, are important for not only the attraction of candidates but also the retention of talent. Candidates that find the workplace different than advertised no longer have the stigma of job jumping and have fewer repercussions to switching jobs.

sign of the job market, as employees can easily go elsewhere if a job doesn't meet their needs and expectations." Often it is related to the job fit and understanding the expectations of the position. "Employers are either not communicating the details of the job, the schedule, and the pay, or employers are so desperate to hire workers that they are not hiring employees who are a good fit for a job. Onboarding, orientation, and initial training should be evaluated to understand where employers are not meeting the expectations of newly hired employees."

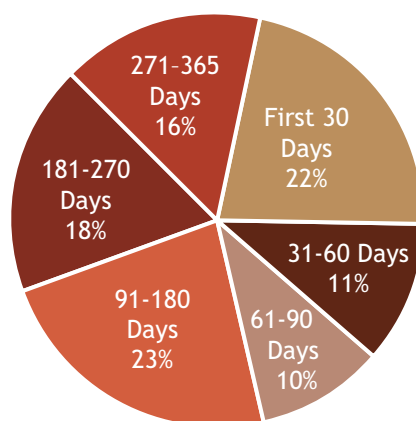
The candidate handoff from recruiting to operations should not only reflect the brand built by the marketing team, but reflect a partnership between operations and human resources that brings engagement and support throughout the employee's career.

Improve employee retention with regular touch points.

Differences in why employees choose to stay or leave jobs after a few months or after many years include a wide range of variables and often depend on where an employee is in their career, life circumstances, age and gender, education, and economic position, but everyone wants to feel connected, recognized, and invested in by their manager and their company.

The Work Institute's findings show that the number one category of employee turnover, career development, has increased by 32 percent since 2013. They also found that a lack of growth and development opportunities continues and has had a 170 percent increase since 2010. ▶

When Employees Quit



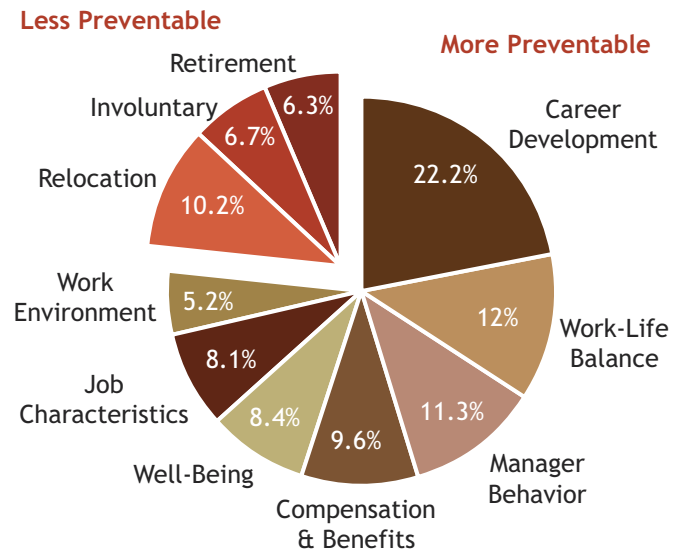
The Work Institute's 2019 Retention Report concluded that more than one-third (38.6 percent) of new employees quit within the first year and 43 out of 100 new employees quit in the first 90 days. Danny Helms, the president of Work Institute, said, "The rise in first-year turnover is a

Career Development is a broad category that involves training on new skills, moving to higher job responsibilities, and making a career change within the same organization. It can also include getting higher pay or receiving incentives and bonuses and achieving job flexibility and satisfaction. It is not surprising that in a workplace where the Pew Research Center has projected that millennials will surpass baby boomers to become the largest living generation in the U.S., there is less opportunity to move upward in the hierarchy. Companies have addressed this by focusing on expanding current roles to allow employees to grow professionally and financially while remaining in the same organizational box. This has forced some companies to consider if their industry, or specific roles within their workforce, require a culture shift from “show up and complete your tasks” to “show up because we are growing and developing.”

A strong partnership between the human resource and operations teams allows companies to understand their employees’ expectations (including generational differences) and how they may change with time. Through productive feedback between both teams and regular reviews of employee data and outcomes, retention programs can be implemented that reflect the employees’ needs. This allows companies to maintain a strong employment brand that supports attraction while being agile enough to change based on outcomes and market changes. Too often, employee programs like succession planning and performance management are solely owned by either the operations or the human resource teams. This can create a disconnect between the actual and intended outcomes when tools don’t reflect the operational workplace, they aren’t regularly refreshed in the face of change, or implementations are not supported by the day-to-day leadership. Employees easily recognize this disconnect and can build expectations or beliefs (brand image) that are opposite of the company’s intentions.

The employee handoff from human resources to operations during onboarding should appear seamless to the employee. With ongoing development check-ins from their leaders, clear communications (for change events and new processes), established company programs (like focal performance reviews, merit cycles, and incentive payouts), and the right recognition programs, employees can feel supported in their roles. If asked today, do your employees understand the current touchpoints? Do your leaders know the importance of each program and what the expected outcomes are for the annual events they are asked to execute? Are your program’s outcomes being reviewed regularly by not only the human resources department but your operations and marketing partners also? By focusing on the lifecycle of your employees and ensuring that leaders are aligned across departments, you provide a workplace that will be attractive to your current and future employees.

Top Ten Categories for Leaving in 2018



Remote worksites and workers change the environment.

In industries with high numbers of remote employees, control over the workplace environment is lessened. The lifecycle of your employees is more dependent on virtual workspaces, how you communicate, and the direct leadership over these roles. Each of these factors has a unique set of obstacles when looking to create a supportive environment that attracts future and current employees.

Virtual workspaces must be managed differently than other communication spaces. Too often, they are virtual bulletin boards with too much content or navigation that don’t reflect the end user’s preferences. Partnerships between information technology, marketing, and operations are key to providing the right space for employees (or prospective employees) to build their brand awareness. Where is the form for performance management? What vendor do we use for leaves? Who in the office manages background checks since the reorganization last month? Employees without good virtual workspaces force their employees to spend critical productivity time looking for information. Ensure during the first 90 days that each employee is being introduced to not only the tools they need but the bigger skill of how to find information within your company. This provides employees with skills they need to utilize the tools and processes the company has available. It also allows them to support other employees.

Communication is bigger than ever with the numerous ways we can connect today. However, that doesn’t automatically equate to better communication with our remote employees. Marketing teams should partner with other departments to define how internal communications will reach employees and collect data on what methods

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are successful. From weekly huddle notes to regular meeting cadences, there are natural communication points driven by the business that can become good conduits to communication when used appropriately. As a group, departments need to consider what information is pertinent to each employee, imperative to share, and what communications should be posted and sought by the employee instead of fed out to employees. When is the annual performance review? What performance metrics are considered in my merit increase? Did I miss turning in my merit recommendations for the team? Each of these questions holds a different level of urgency and their answers should be communicated in different ways. Ensuring that partnerships exist across the organization regarding communications allows employees to navigate independently (on their timeframe when available), which is imperative to our remote employees.

In our industry, many employees work remotely either by themselves or with small teams but may not have the support system offices provide. Leaders of remote workers will define the workplace experience for these employees. This is important when we consider the effect that leaders have on employee retention. In the State of the American Manager report, GALLOP found that one in two employees have left a job to get away from a manager and improve their overall life at some point in their career. The Work Institute reported that Generation X and women are less tolerant of issues related to manager and supervisor behavior.

GALLOP reports that “Managers account for at least 70 percent of the variance in employee engagement scores.” The adage “employees leave managers, not companies” seem to hold true. Managers also have a significant impact on employee engagement, which not only adds to reason employees begin looking for other work but also the success and profitability of our businesses. With millennials being the largest group in the workforce, it is important to note that only 29 percent are engaged in the workplace.

For our remote employees, the direct leadership defines the brand for them each day. Poor leaders in these environments directly impact not only turnover but the attraction of future employees. Investing in regular leadership check-ins and requesting regular feedback from your leadership helps to not only identify issues early but to also identify where programs and processes are restricting good leadership. Do your leaders have the time necessary to have good conversations with their employees? Are leaders able to take the time to ask employees questions and understand their viewpoints? Can leadership provide productive feedback to other areas of the business efficiently? These are key pieces to defining the company’s brand image for internal employees and external candidates.



Consider both compensation and benefits.

Just like the other pieces we discussed, compensation and benefits are pieces to attracting and retaining talent. Employees want a fair wage and a clear path to increasing that wage as time progresses based on their performance and development. However, it is important to ensure that compensation and benefits are not viewed as the single tool for solving these dilemmas. When polling employees about benefits and compensation as detractors or promoters, most companies find that these categories are both considered. Employees often see the value in benefits more as an outcome of where they are in their lifecycle than as a true piece of their total compensation. A 23-year-old may not see any value in benefits when you hire him/her, but their view changes when they get married and have the health of another person to consider. Benefits should reflect your employee mix while providing support during critical life changes. They are part of your strategy that must work in concert with other critical pieces like leadership and communication.

Unlike benefits, compensation can be a clearer tool to use. Pay competitively or there may be few other factors in play when candidates consider an offer. However, unless your market position is based on being the highest paying in the market, compensation will always need to be viewed as part of the total reward package. Often, companies lean on high compensation offers to bring in talent but do not follow up on this investment. If you bring in a highly experienced employee above the normal internal equity for a role, do they provide more productivity and future growth? Or does human resources hand over the newly hired candidate without a future return-on-investment (ROI) conversation with leaders and operations? Operations, finance, and human resources have to partner regularly on what the company’s compensation philosophy is and how it will be maintained. If either department acts without the diligence of the other departments, companies can face inequitable equity practices, budget creep, or wrong employee investments that all impact retention.

Attraction, turnover, and retention are often considered the sole responsibility of human resources despite the significant impacts other departments have on these results. In the face of the hiring market our companies face today and the increased impact that these have on specialized industries, it is important that companies focus on the partnerships needed to maintain their brand image. The best recruiting strategies and development programs will fail in the face of poor leadership or employment brand disconnect within the company. Companies need to ensure that key departments in the employee lifecycle and workplace environment are partnering within the goal to improve attraction and retention.



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Creating Successful Workforce Retention Programs

By Patrick Larsen, Regional Manager, CNUC

Hiring and retaining an experienced and engaged workforce has become a challenge in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry due in part to the tremendous growth and the developmental changes in our industry’s external environment. The UVM industry’s best management practices (BMPs), improved safety practices, equipment, and UVM programs are consistently being reviewed and improved. In response, we need an informed, motivated, and dedicated workforce that can respond well to those changes.

In a business environment where there is intense competition for the best employees, it is essential for hiring managers and companies to review their current retention programs and make necessary changes to be successful.

What Employees Want

There is not one retention plan that will work for every employee because human beings are complicated. We each have our own opinions, priorities, and motivation. For a hiring manager or company, it can be difficult to pinpoint and satisfy each person’s wants and needs. That is why companies need an array of broad programs and initiatives that are intended to identify the majority of the workforce’s motivating factors, goals, and de-motivators or turn-offs.

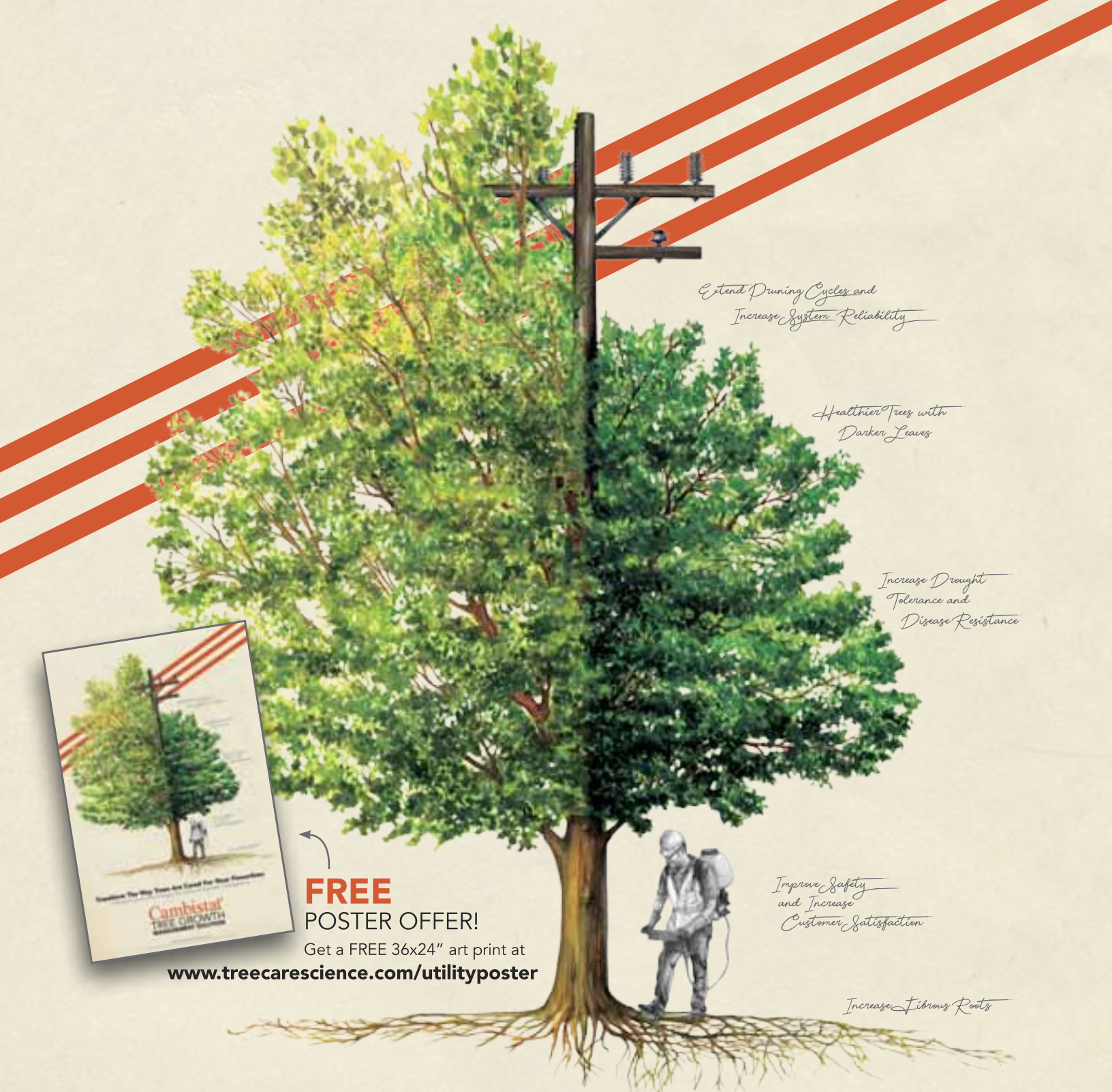
Many companies have answered the need for improved retention by designing retention programs for all position levels. This approach has led to a significant increase in employee satisfaction and employee retention. If employees and companies are united in achieving a company’s goals and developing its workforce,

employees are more likely to remain with that company longer.

Start with Recruitment

Several companies have taken a multi-level approach to workforce retention starting at the beginning—the recruitment stage. Successful hiring recruiters identify the critical skills needed to be successful in each role then, using their knowledge of social media, online job boards, college job fairs, and more, target and reach out to the hundreds of qualified, eager candidates that are looking for a job. Recruiters should be trained in the industry or have worked in the operations side of the industry themselves so they can clearly and honestly inform candidates about the duties, requirements, and benefits of each job.

After recruitment, human resources and hiring managers can interview the candidates that meet the requirements for open positions. Training human resources and hiring managers to be able to identify the candidates that align with the company’s overall vision, mission, and values is a critical component of this process. ▶



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The Importance of Onboarding

Companies that do not rush the onboarding phase have stated that they see an increase in workforce retention. If time is spent with the newly hired employee explaining company policies and procedures, defining rules and responsibilities, and establishing expectations, employees can start their new job ready for success. They are more likely to excel, which in turn leads to increased satisfaction for both the employee and employer. Once an employee is hired, onboarded, and trained, it is essential to continue education and development.

Continual Development

Numerous companies have transitioned from often dreaded employee reviews to employee development programs. Employee reviews measure

employee performance but little else, while employee development programs measure performance, open a line of communication between supervisors and employees, and assist employees in setting personal and professional goals that benefit both parties.

For these types of programs to be successful, they need to be done more than once per year. At the very least, there needs to be a check-in period established for increased accountability on both sides. Listening to your teams and helping them set and achieve their goals is a sure-fire way to ensure that the company is investing in them and, in turn, they are investing in the company.

Conduct Exit Interviews

Finally, exit interviews can play an essential role in a company's workforce

retention plan. Although it is seemingly an after-the-fact process, it can be advantageous to poll employees that are moving to new opportunities to learn why they are leaving. Perhaps there is a trend that can be identified and adjusted to benefit employees, which may lead to increased retention. It is also a great way to gauge an employee's perception of the company culture.

Conclusion

To summarize, there isn't one standard and proven method of improving workforce retention. There are numerous programs to try, some successful and others not so much. However, one undeniable fact is the need to consistently monitor and review company programs, speak to employees, and continue to improve to keep up with the everyday changes.

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Georgia Power Brings Scholarship and Internship Opportunities to UGA Warnell Forestry Students

By Matt Goff, Vegetation Manager, Georgia Power

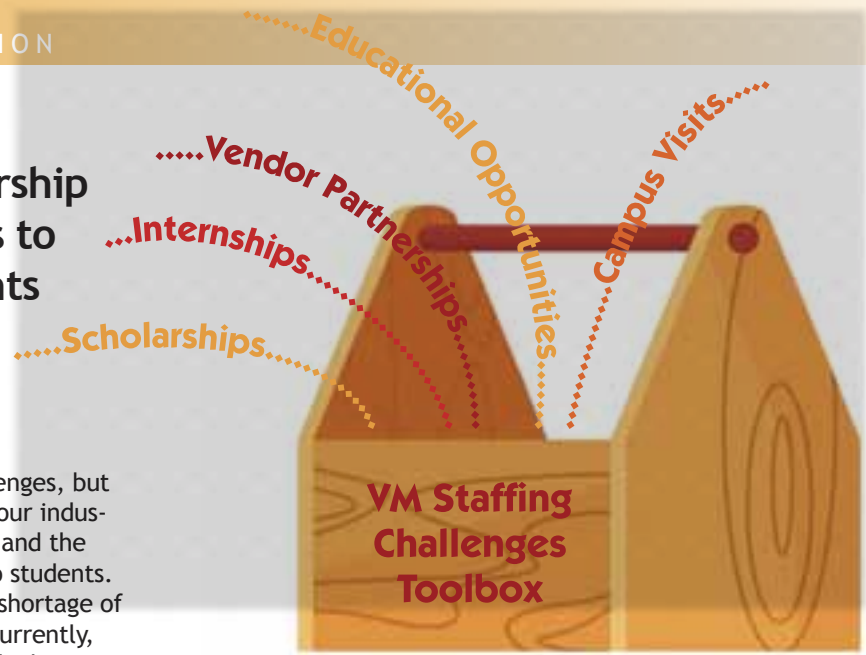
Looking Back to Move Forward

Vegetation management (VM) faces several challenges, but one of the most critical comes from the roots of our industry: a lack of awareness about the industry itself and the career and educational opportunities available to students. With time, the result of this has manifested as a shortage of qualified workers to help advance the industry. Currently, the country has very low unemployment rates, which means the competition for workers and professionals is high. The lack of awareness about the career paths in the VM industry, coupled with strong competition from other job markets, equates to the challenges we face as it relates to attracting and retaining talent to our industry.

After graduating from the University of Georgia (UGA), I spent seven years in traditional forestry before I was hired in 2003 with Georgia Power as a utility arborist. While my career path has worked out very well for me, you might say it was far from intentional. I now realize my career path is similar to that of my coworkers. In passing conversations, we began wondering what our careers would have been like if we'd had earlier knowledge of the opportunities which exist in the VM industry. For example, would scholarships, or paid internship opportunities, or exposure to industry functions have helped me as a student make more confident decisions about my career earlier in my education?

Our awareness of the staffing challenges our industry faces grew as we strategized and debated on methods to address our own staffing challenges. One approach we took was to revive our internship program. As one of the many alumni of the UGA working at Georgia Power, several of my coworkers and myself contacted the UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources about revitalizing our internship program on their campus.

In 2014, our internship committee held interviews on the UGA campus and successfully hired one intern. While on campus, we soon realized most students didn't understand the arborist role until they learned more by interacting with the hiring committee. It was then they heard about the role from people performing the duties. It became clear just how important it was to talk with students about our jobs and to share with them the opportunities available to them in VM. Initially, our efforts were intent upon improving our talent pipeline for utility arborists, but we soon realized that was just the beginning of what was possible. After successfully restarting our intern program, we began to see there is a need to raise awareness for the career opportunities in urban and utility forestry.



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Branching Out

After that first year, Dr. Dale Greene—the Dean of the Warnell School—connected me with Dr. Kim Coder, professor of community forestry, tree biology, and health care. Dr. Coder called together a working committee consisting of numerous stakeholders to help finalize what would become a curriculum focused on raising awareness for the industry and preparing students for successful careers in VM. The committee members represented a breadth of knowledge and experience: Warnell faculty, State of Georgia Forestry staff, private practice arborists, entrepreneurs, VM professionals, and others worked with Dr. Coder to help him create the curriculum for the area of emphasis entitled *Community Forestry and Arboriculture* (COFA). It was an honor to be a member of this team. This curriculum is now being offered under the umbrella of the Natural Resource Management and Sustainability degree at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry.

With time, we've started engaging more professional resources to help us further our work and support our needs. Examples of these efforts include partnering with vendors and the local community to sponsor scholarships. We also worked with other people and organizations in the VM profession, such as ACRT, and began developing more opportunities for education and growth.

As we continue this journey, we know that in order to grow, every program needs students—and one way to get the word out is through scholarships. Additionally, we plan to be on campus regularly—again, regular interaction with students is key to our recruitment goals. What some students may not be aware of is the breadth of experience they will gain through industry involvement during their college years while pursuing careers in urban and utility forestry. Knowing your options upfront can provide valuable work-related experiences and additional opportunities to kickstart careers. We want students to be aware of their options early on to ensure they get as much experience as possible. ▶

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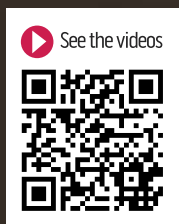
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Vegetation Management Specialists

It wasn't until I served on the COFA committee that I realized just how many opportunities were available—not only in the U.S. but also throughout the world. After all, the program is about much more than just utility right-of-way (ROW) management and extends to others beyond those interested in arboriculture. This program is also for entrepreneurs that want to run businesses as well as those in private practice. And when you factor in transferrable experiences from multiple areas and degrees, the career possibilities are nearly endless.

Nothing compares to gaining real-world, first-hand field experience. The current COFA program is set up to provide students with the hands-on education they need to truly understand what arboriculture and VM all are about. Students are required to have an internship, which should be paid, so they are being compensated for their time and hard work. Upon graduation, students will have the advantage of industry-related job experience relevant to their degrees.

Funding the Future

In addition to providing UGA Warnell students with internship opportunities, the Georgia Power Foundation has elected to fund two annual non-endowed scholarships of \$1,500 each to provide more opportunities for students. In

support, our third-party VM partner ACRT and their West Coast sister company ACRT Pacific have each matched that amount, guaranteeing at least \$6,000 worth of scholarships for students attending UGA during the 2020 school year. We hope to raise more scholarship money and further expand internship opportunities as more students enroll and the program continues to grow. A college education is expensive—financial assistance is an important tool to attract students to the program.

By receiving scholarship opportunities from the Georgia Power Foundation as well as other VM companies, students will have a better opportunity to gain relevant job experience and have more momentum in their chosen profession. Our work in the program has also helped to raise general awareness and is helping those looking for a job in the industry to gain a better understanding of what we do.

Now, Georgia Power is looking to challenge other VM companies in supporting the growth and education of the future arborists of their respective communities. We believe it is critical that the industry invests in those who will one day carry on our work of providing valuable service to our customers. I hope our work at the UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources provides a framework for your organization. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at DMGOFF@southernco.com.

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Pat Paternostro is the perfect example. Beginning his career of more than 20 years with ACRT in 1997 as a field technician in California, Paternostro is currently the operations manager for two of our Western U.S. customers. While he is now based in

California, his career has allowed him to travel extensively. To date, Paternostro has worked in nearly every state.

Throughout his tenure with our organization, Paternostro has become a source of expertise through his mentorship of new hires and those considering a career in vegetation management (VM). His extensive industry knowledge has made him a go-to for team members nationwide.

"The job's always different, and nothing is ever the same year to year," Paternostro said. "The industry faces many challenges, but adapting to them alongside our customers is what makes this industry unique."

While Paternostro cites our dynamic industry as a motivator, it still comes



second to what really drives both him and the organization.

"There's a reason I've been here this long. They take care of their people. It's the people I've met over the years that drive me. I love the work, but I've made many great friends. We know how to get the job done, but we also know how to have fun."

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"Knowledge is power." While frequently used, this phrase still holds true. At Davey, we believe that knowledge is an ever-expanding landscape of opportunity. The more we can learn, the better service providers we become.



That's why Davey started its biannual program, the Davey Institute of Utility Sciences (DIUS) seminar. This week-long course shares the latest information available with a group of top-notch Utility Solutions professionals from across North America.

The DIUS program takes a holistic approach. Hands-on exercises and inquiry-based learning encourages students to interact and participate rather than sit passive in a lecture. Students are grouped into geographically diverse teams to promote conversations about processes and challenges. The instructors perpetuate this concept well after DIUS graduation by assigning online group continuing education unit (CEU) projects. The courses aim to help students better understand safe work practices and improve communication between job roles.

Crew leaders, general foremen, work planners, and other Davey Utility Solutions team members trained under this program pay it forward by passing on the knowledge and advice they learned to their local team members and sharing with other industry professionals.

DIUS is in its third year with around 200 graduating students to date. Since its inception, data shows that 89 percent of graduating DIUS students stick with Davey as a long-term career. Graduates receive a coin to remind them of their participation in the program and their commitment to advancing utility arboriculture.

Davey believes anyone can be an industry leader if given the proper tools. The company understands the challenges our field teams face and are invested in providing an education that creates an elite team of solution providers. To learn more about Davey Utility Solutions, visit www.daveyutilitiesolutions.com.



Workforce Retention

By Chris Potter, Manager of Transmission VM Oversight, FirstEnergy

At FirstEnergy, we recognize our most valuable assets are our employees. We make our customers' lives brighter by relying on our employees to help deliver safe and reliable electric service every day. With the current strong economy, talented employees are in demand and voluntary employee turnover continues to rise in many industries. This presents significant challenges to organizations attempting to attract and retain talent, particularly in career fields that value a dedicated and motivated labor force. In FirstEnergy's transmission vegetation management (VM) group, we welcome the challenge. Our future success will be predicated on our commitment to attracting the next generation of workers by implementing innovative recruiting efforts, competitive compensation, and creating a workplace where diverse employees feel valued, motivated, and empowered to succeed.

Recent economic trends in the U.S. demonstrate the number of available positions and the competition to attract talent are both increasing sharply. It is also well established that the costs associated with employee turnover is high and directly affects how a company performs. To handle the challenges inherent in today's tight labor market, FirstEnergy believes it's imperative we continue to identify successful, diverse talent during the hiring process, but we also need to take steps to retain the talent we already have. Managing employee retention is multifaceted, so it's necessary to implement effective retention strategies to keep employees motivated and satisfied. Our employees have responded favorably to programs directly related to their work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, alternative reporting locations, paid time off for volunteering, and a talent management process that introduces our employees to the possibility of new opportunities. As a result, our company is very competitive when it comes to retaining talent, and we are also positioned favorably to react to future workforce trends.

We appreciate that retention can be a mutually beneficial situation between management and employees—where the needs of the employee are met to the greatest extent possible without sacrificing the goals of the company. FirstEnergy is also in the unique position of relying upon contractor work to complete our VM obligations, which means we need to consider not only our working conditions, but also the conditions of our contractors. As time has passed, FirstEnergy has experienced success implementing retention strategies with our contractors,



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including pay rate reviews and adjustments, flexible work schedules, rotational storm work, long-term contractual commitments, and industry collaboration to ensure equivalent compensation. By encouraging our contractors to implement programs that improve their employee retention, we ensure we can continue to rely upon an active talent pool of qualified contractors to continue to provide the support we need.

As we have broadened our exposure to labor market retention efforts, we have also partnered with organizations like the UAA's Workforce Retention Taskforce. FirstEnergy's Director of VM Rebecca Spach is acting as Taskforce Champion and I serve as the Retention Subcommittee Leader. Going forward, FirstEnergy has also made workforce retention an objective in our transmission VM Strategic Plan. We

intend to take an active role by partnering with our valued suppliers and contractors to attract, train, and retain a skilled labor workforce.

At FirstEnergy, we know the importance of developing a culture that empowers a diverse team of innovative and engaged employees. We also believe that without understanding and acting on employee concerns, organizations could be left to operate with too few (and less talented) workers. Consequently, it's clear that a comprehensive employee retention program plays a vital role in both attracting and retaining key employees, as well as in reducing turnover and its related costs. At FirstEnergy, by building the work environment our employees want, we will attract and retain the high-performing workforce we need to continue to make our customers lives brighter for years to come.

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Tree Worker Shortages and the Impact of SB 247 in California

*Opinion Editorial by Scott Huffmaster,
Contract Specialist, Mountain F.
Enterprises, Inc.*

Within the past five years, the need for qualified electrical line clearance tree trimmers has grown exponentially due to the increased need for regulatory compliance, wildfire prevention, bark beetle mitigation, and emergency fire response events that have plagued the state of California and the electrical utilities who provide energy delivery services. While this increased demand for resources saw an influx of vegetation management (VM) companies and tree trimming resources, the supply still fell short of the demand, especially regarding experienced climbers. Despite the best efforts of the contractors who were working for the California electrical utility companies, the demand for experienced labor was not unique to the state of California and has impacted electrical utilities across the U.S. where there continues to be a seemingly endless request for VM resources.

In early October 2019, the Governor of California signed Senate Bill No. 247 which further increased the focus on “Wildland fire prevention: VM.” SB 247 works in conjunction with prior existing laws surrounding wildfire safety, but, more specifically, is intended to increase the accountability for electrical utility companies on the implementation of their wildfire plans and how that relates to VM. At the time of the initial

bill development and the various iterations that were discussed in the state legislative arena, a decision was made to include requirements for both the qualifications for electrical line clearance tree trimmers and the required prevailing wage that would be paid to these skilled positions. While many of the electrical line clearance tree trimmers had been previously covered under a bargaining unit agreement or a prevailing wage requirement, SB 247 increased the prevailing wage to mirror that of an apprentice electrical utility lineman, working under the “Outside Line Agreement.” The purpose of this added language to SB 247 was to attract skilled labor out to California to meet the growing needs of the electrical utilities and their wildfire prevention efforts.

In order to put the impact of SB 247 into perspective, depending on where an electrical line clearance tree trimmer lived, the overall compensation package increased between 40 and 85 percent. This increase was balanced between increased direct wages, but the greatest impact was seen in the increased level of company-funded retirement that is now being provided to the employee. While the specific language contained in SB 247 addressed the “qualified line clearance tree trimmers” in order to create a pipeline of future qualified tree trimmers through the process of negotiation with the various unions, contractors, and electrical utility companies,

scaled increases were also provided to those labor classifications that did not meet the definition as outlined in SB 247. This was done in order to more completely address the long-term labor shortages and hopefully create an environment that encouraged interest from potential workers from other related industries inside California, as well as those that may be interested in relocating to California on a permanent basis.

Through the process of the labor contract negotiation, a great deal of credit goes to the participating contractors and the representatives of the IBEW 1245, 465, and 47, who all worked together through multiple face-to-face meetings to come up with best possible outcome from SB 247. The goal of the negotiation was to come up with a statewide labor agreement that was compliant with the law but also served to provide the most responsive and cost-effective option for the electrical utility companies who will ultimately be responsible for paying for the increased cost.

As of the writing of this article, SB 247 has only officially been in place for less than a month, and at first glance, the desired impact to attract new resources has at least been initially successful. In order to better evaluate the success of SB 247, a follow-up article will be provided in the coming months to provide an update once the initial group of personnel has been fully onboarded and working.



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