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Volume 15

Number 1

# UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON WORKFORCE RETENTION AND DEI

**MECHANIZED  
TECHNOLOGIES**  
THE FUTURE OF VEGETATION  
MANAGEMENT

**HOW TO START  
A CAREER AS A  
UTILITY ARBORIST**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**DEVELOP A  
LEARNING  
CULTURE**  
THROUGH HUMAN  
AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
PERFORMANCES

**CREATING A CLIMATE-  
RESILIENT OAK FOREST**  
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Turn to **page 14** to learn how to attract and retain talent.



Read part 2 of the history of integrated vegetation management on **page 24**.



Read more about women in the UVM workplace on **page 40**

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This is a list of common industry terms and acronyms frequently used in this magazine.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)  
Best Management Practices (BMPs)  
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)  
Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)

Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)  
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)  
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Rights-of-Way (ROW)  
Subject Matter Expert (SME)  
Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)  
Vegetation Management (VM)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Brandon Hughson

Our strength lies in our community, where knowledge is shared freely and collaboration knows no bounds.

## Uniting the Utility Arborist Association: A Global Perspective

In the ever-evolving world of utility arboriculture, the Utility Arborist Association has emerged as a platform for collaboration, innovation, and inclusivity. I am honored to shed light on the remarkable journey of our organization, where diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) play a pivotal role, and our reach extends far beyond the United States.

The UAA is more than just an association; it's a global family of professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise. Our reach extends across multiple countries, demonstrating the universal appeal of our mission and the relevance of our work on a global scale. While we're deeply rooted in the United States, we have welcomed arborists, experts, and enthusiasts from various corners of the world. This international diversity not only enriches our knowledge base but also broadens our perspective, making the UAA a truly global force in the field of utility arboriculture.

Inclusivity isn't limited to geography; it's embedded in every facet of our association. Our members span the entire spectrum of expertise, from entry-level arborists, eager to learn and grow, to seasoned executives who have honed their skills over decades. In the UAA, we value every voice, regardless of where they are in their career journey. The diversity of experience and perspectives within our community is a testament to our commitment to fostering excellence in utility arboriculture.

Our strength lies in our community, where knowledge is shared freely and collaboration knows no bounds. The UAA is not just a resource for arborists, but a hub for experts across various disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach has expanded our horizons, enabling us to evolve and adapt in an ever-changing industry.

Inclusivity has been a cornerstone of our association's growth. Our dedication to DEIB isn't just about ticking checkboxes—it's about creating an environment where every member feels valued, respected, and empowered. In a global context, this becomes even more critical as we strive to welcome professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities,

and genders. It's our pledge that within the UAA everyone belongs and their contributions are celebrated.

Recruiting and retaining talent within our industry presents challenges that the UAA is resolutely addressing. The shortage of skilled professionals and the high turnover rates in utility arboriculture are concerns we're all facing, both in the United States and beyond. Our diverse and inclusive community actively works to attract and retain talent, providing resources and support to individuals at every stage of their careers. By facing these challenges head-on, we are not only fortifying our industry but also contributing to the well-being of our environment and society as a whole. Our industry has faced challenges in attracting a diverse workforce, and to address this, the UAA has been proactive in promoting careers in utility arboriculture among minorities, women, and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds. Our efforts are aimed at ensuring that the global talent pool in our industry becomes more diverse and inclusive, contributing to our collective growth and progress.

The Utility Arborist Association serves as a global hub for unity, diversity of expertise, and inclusivity. Our outreach knows no bounds, uniting members from across the globe with a wide range of knowledge and skills. The UAA is an expansive platform where the exchange of ideas and collaboration thrives, unrestrained by geographical constraints. As our community continues to evolve, it's crucial that we emphasize the significance of hearing from voices across our industry. We recognize that we can't accomplish our goals without the collective insights and experiences of our members, which are essential for bolstering our brand and sharing the captivating stories that define us. Our community is a mosaic of diverse perspectives and contributions, and together we will keep progressing, innovating, and prospering as a united and globally influential entity, one story at a time. 🌱

*Brandon Hughson*



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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon

“We should all resolve to intentionally seek out opportunities to tell our stories—share the positive impacts and science of how and why we do our work.”

Every day pre-inspectors are in the field identifying work and non-work alike. In some fashion, these areas are recorded, inventoried, and communicated based on scope of work goals. This describes one piece of larger UVM programs and is loaded with different skills required to make this happen. Skills like traveling to, from, and across sites, identifying what is on that site, including (and not limited to) risk, priority, impact, plant species, consequence, potential, opportunity, facilities, and more. Each of those identification items requires additional skills and understanding. For example, the capacity of the facility will likely impact consequence. The design of the facility, like radial feed or built redundancies, can impact priority, risk, and others. The role of the pre-inspector, work planner, or whatever title that role is given in an area is often one of the entry-level roles in our industry and is also significantly important.

Truth be had, the impact our work has on the social fabric of the communities we serve makes every role significant. The success of a program is often dependent upon the success of each step in the process and how well each step is accomplished. Handing off a no-work site to a work team wastes resources by sending a crew to a location for no reason. The inverse is also true: failing to identify work at a site likely results in that site going unworked. The whole process is interconnected, much like the grid and society.

There was a time when UVM was a lot less professional than it is today. As professional arborists, foresters, and ROW research began to infiltrate UVM programs, the quality of those programs has increased. There has been a lag in recognition from some external groups around the level of professionalism and scientific rigor occurring in the field every day. That lag has, on occasion, manifested itself in green industry conferences or public meetings, and it will continue to surface until the “secret truth” that trees and utilities can coexist comes to light.

Not only can they coexist, but there are experts out in our communities each day making that existence happen.

A few years back at the Trees & Utilities Conference, Scott Packard from Wright Tree Service presented a video he had recorded asking folks in a city setting if they knew about our industry or could define some of our terms. The piece was like a late-night comedy sketch from national talk shows—people had little or no idea about how our daily work positively impacts their lives, or who we even *are*. The bit probably would have been funnier had it not hit so close to home, and I think that is exactly what Packard intended.

This issue of the *UAN* is focused on community and the interactions of UVM within those communities. The UAA has been working hard to tell our industry’s story outside the usual spaces where our story is known. We have an active outreach committee seeking opportunities, and the board is working on innovations like exposing this very publication to a wider audience by making back issues publicly available on the UAA website. We are continuously looking for ways to enhance external awareness of our profession and the positive impact it has on the communities where we work, play, and live.

In 2024 we should all resolve to intentionally seek out opportunities to tell our stories—share the positive impacts and science of how and why we do our work. One specific way we intend to do this is to mindfully tell the story about how vital energy and nature combined are to our socioeconomic survival and the roles each of us has in ensuring that energy is safely and consistently getting to where it is needed. Those stories are about the people who are out there every day analyzing risk, priority, impact, plant species, consequence, potential, opportunity, facilities, and more. We are telling your story.

Enjoy this issue of the *Utility Arborist Newsline*. Make it a safe 2024. 🌳

*Dennis Fallon*





## MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Your donation to the UAA Nelson Money Scholarship Program supports students looking to pursue various careers in utility line clearance, UVM, arboriculture, forestry, urban forestry, or related fields to help boost our ever-changing industry!

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## UVM BEST PRACTICES COMMITTEE UPDATE



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## Utility Vegetation Management Best Practices Committee Update

The Utility Vegetation Management Best Practices Committee continues to pursue topics surrounding both the emerging challenges that face the UVM industry as well as the new innovations in the ever-changing landscape of UVM. These intensive discussions among vegetation managers from around the country bring about collaborative efforts to create best management practices, increased efficiency, and solutions for utilities striving to improve respective UVM programs on a global level. The 2023 Utility Vegetation Managers Summit, sponsored by FirstEnergy, was held in Akron, Ohio. The summit topics included:

- UVM funding challenges, and solutions for current and future state
- Tree failure reporting practices
- Mechanized equipment innovations

The collaboration of the summit team is producing three articles for the *Utility Arborist Newsline*. Part 1, "Tree-Caused Outage Terminology for Vegetation Managers" by Cindy Musick, was featured in the November/December 2023 issue. This January/February 2024 issue features part 2, "Mechanized Vegetation Management Technologies" by Duane Dickinson.

Part 3, regarding funding challenges, will be published in the March/April 2024 *Newsline*.

Looking forward to 2024, the summit will take place in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, from May 14-16, with Holy Cross Energy being the host utility. The committee is currently sifting through an array of topics as well as procuring presenters. Some of the topics being considered are explored below.

### CYCLE-BASED VS. RISK-BASED

The technology and accuracy, using remote sensing coupled with AI capabilities, is increasing and becoming more readily available. Utilities are considering a potential move toward risk-based treatments of easements. Questions posed surrounding this approach include: Is this a viable possibility with the current technology? Are there case studies supporting this method? What are the drawbacks relative to the gains?

### MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE ON VEGETATION

Severe drought in the West over the last decade is creating die-off of vegetation on a large scale, as well as increasing risk in the East. The emerald ash borer epidemic is a

prime example of one such risk. We, as vegetation managers, are tasked with the responsibility to mitigate these increasing risks. There is a need to find new ways of adding resiliency to vegetation management programs.

### ATTRACTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF UTILITY ARBORISTS

Workforce retention has become a hot-button topic for the UVM industry. Increasing efforts in this arena will pay dividends, but only in the short term. Attracting and training new utility arborists and foresters is an essential long-term solution. It is necessary to pass on the knowledge and skills as we hand off the future of the industry to those who will follow through apprenticeship programs and formal education.

This year has seen Adam Johnson step down as chair of the committee. Brandon Hughson has stepped down as the UAA champion, and is being replaced by Matt Goff. Both Johnson and Hughson remain on the committee as valued members. Thank you both for your dedicated service to the UAA and the utility vegetation management world.

We hope to see you in Colorado next May! 🌲





# TECHNOLOGY

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## SAFETY TOOLS

# What Is “Safety Culture”?

By Mark Kimbrough, Vice President of Safety & Training, The Townsend Company, LLC

**T**he term “safety culture” gets discussed a lot, but it is also a term that many people do not quite understand. What exactly is safety culture? And what, if any, impact does it have on a company’s liability risks?

Safety culture is one of those fuzzy concepts that nobody can precisely define but everybody knows it when they see it. **Safety culture** is first and foremost a mindset, a set of shared values and thinking among all the members of an organization.

When we say a company has a “good safety culture,” we basically mean that people who work there care about and accord high priority to safety—that safety is a part of the company’s DNA that gets transmitted to all progenies.

Probably the best way to identify safety culture is by looking for the characteristics it is associated with. Thus, according to a study from the University of Illinois, in a workplace with a safety culture, everyone at every level of the company places enduring value and priority on safety and:

- Is committed to personal responsibility for safety
- Acts to preserve, enhance, and communicate safety concerns
- Strives to actively learn, adapt, and modify their behavior based on lessons learned from safety errors and incidents
- Is rewarded in a manner consistent with these values

Safety culture generally yields safe performance. Although accidents and injuries can still happen at companies with strong safety cultures, such mishaps tend to be more the product of bad luck than carelessness, neglect, or lack of adequate safety resources.

## How Safety Culture Affects Liability

Safety culture also has an important—albeit indirect—impact on a company’s liability risks. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations do not say employers need a good “safety culture.” In fact, they do not mention the term at all. Nevertheless, safety culture is a concept that OSHA officials embrace and refer to in enforcing regulatory requirements. An organization’s safety culture, or lack thereof, is a factor considered by:

- OSHA inspectors in determining whether to issue citations and how to classify them (e.g., as “serious” or “willful”)
- OSHA inspectors and administrators in deciding how much to fine an organization for a particular violation
- Courts and administrative tribunals like the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (OSHRC) in deciding whether to uphold OSHA fines and penalties on appeal

## The Bottom Line

The existence of an active safety culture is a mitigating factor likely to result in lesser penalties or no penalties at all. The lack of a safety culture is an aggravating factor likely to lead to more severe penalties, as well as targeted follow-up enforcement under programs like the Severe Violator Enforcement Program (SVEP).

A good safety culture begins at the top and takes the position that leadership owns everything. A positive safety culture will affect every part of your company. 🌱



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## WOMEN IN VM



## NEW IN 2024:

## By Women, For Women, Celebrating Women

By Leslie Kass, Chief Executive Officer, Lewis Services  
Photos courtesy of Lewis.



Lewis CEO Leslie Kass making the introductory remarks at the Trees & Utilities Conference.

The annual “turning-of-the-page” ritual to a shiny new year never fails to deliver the thrill of a clean slate and the promise of something new: new goals to pursue, new challenges to tackle, and new trails to blaze.

As we mark the beginning of 2024, it is my honor to introduce an exciting “new” for the *Utility Arborist Newsline*: the launch of the “Women in Utility Vegetation Management” feature column. “Women in UVM” will now be a standing

section in every *Newsline* issue, spotlighting the successes of women across our industry, offering advice from female leaders who have advanced and broken through barriers on their journeys, and sharing perspectives from those who are just starting their careers.

As the first female CEO at Lewis in the company’s 85-year history, I am particularly excited about this dedicated space as I deeply appreciate the generations of women who served as ceiling-busters in both the utility and vegetation management sectors—and those who continue to mentor and support their female colleagues.

At the 2023 Trees & Utilities Conference, Lewis was proud to sponsor the keynote speaker, and I had the privilege of providing the introductory remarks after attending my first Women in Vegetation Management pre-conference workshop. As I addressed the impressive assembly of over 1,000 industry leaders and business partners, I was inspired to see the number of women in the audience—an important cohort that we must continue to cultivate, support, and expand. Not only are their contributions critical to the success of our

organizations, but their valuable experiences enhance the diversity of our teams and lend unique insights in serving the people who depend upon reliable power every day: teachers, families, medical professionals, and an endless list of others. And as you’ll read in this issue of *Newsline*, diversity is not simply a “nice to have” when possible but a *must-have* on our frontlines, in the office, and on our boards (see “The Intersection of Safety, Inclusivity, and Leadership” by Heather Steranka).

Throughout my 30-year career in the utilities industry, I was frequently the only woman in leadership meetings. Prior to being Lewis’ first female CEO, I was the first female CEO for Babcock & Wilcox, a leader in the energy industry for 150 years. Not one to shy away from a challenge, I embraced the responsibilities and opportunities associated with these roles and committed to being the leader and mentor that I would want to have.

While many are making (and breaking!) New Year’s resolutions at this time of year, I would like to offer some New Year’s goals instead:

- Take advantage of the *Newsline*’s exciting new feature and make “Women in UVM” a reading priority with each issue.
- Create opportunities for young women who are considering careers in our fields—and *expand* opportunities for those already in these sectors.
- Increase the number of women that your organization invites to the 2024 Trees & Utilities Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, and use it as a leadership development opportunity.
- Register for the 2024 Women in Vegetation Management Workshop at T&U, and join me as I give the keynote address!

Congratulations to the *Newsline* on the launch of this important new column and thank you to the women who have been blazing trails so that others may flourish. 🌱



2024 TREES & UTILITIES

# Call for Papers

Trees & Utilities is the chief learning and engagement event for utility vegetation managers and associated urban forestry professionals. During the conference you will learn about the latest utility arboriculture research, best management practices, and environmental concerns.

Whether you are interested in being an exhibitor, sponsor, or simply attending the conference, be sure to mark your calendars for next year's conference in Fort Worth, Texas from September 10-12, 2024.

Submission closes February 14, 2024.

2024 TREES & UTILITIES  
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## Trees & Lines Podcast Brings Industry Experts to the Microphone

**W**hat do LiDAR, wildfires, and butterflies all have in common? They've all been discussed at various points on the *Trees & Lines* podcast. On *Trees & Lines*, the future of the vegetation management industry is at the forefront—but no two conversations are alike.

You may have seen us recording episodes in Pittsburgh from the expo floor of Trees & Utilities and wondered what we're all about. Our mission is to provide a platform for fresh perspectives on utility vegetation management. We're building a community of industry thought leaders, pioneers, and out-of-the-box thinkers, and we want you to join us.

On *Trees & Lines*, hosts Phil Charlton (the UVM *legend*) and Tej Singh (Iapetus Infrastructure Services COO) are joined by a diverse range of guests to explore UVM's hottest topics. Guests so far have included UAA Executive Director Dennis Fallon; UAA Past Presidents John Goodfellow, Steve Hallmark, Sara Sankowich, and Eric Brown; current UAA President Brandon Hughson; and UAA President Elect Matt Goff—not to mention a slew of other industry difference-makers bringing new ideas, research, and innovation to the table. Discussing new technologies, safety, and human performance, UVM career paths, ESG initiatives, and more, we're covering a lot of ground and continue to branch out with every new episode.

We're looking forward to future conversations and we hope you'll join our growing community! Head over to [treesandlines.com](https://treesandlines.com) to see what we're all about. 🌳



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# Solving Talent Attraction and Retention Challenges with Commitment to a People-Centric Culture

By Joe Jurec, Growth Leader and Executive Coach, CultureShoc  
Images courtesy of CultureShoc.



Joe Jurec

If you're reading this, you already understand that healthy workplace culture and effective leadership are more than just corporate jargon; they're the pillars of a successful, sustainable business. But how do you move from *understanding* to *action*? How do you navigate the complexities of human behavior, organizational growth, and the ever-changing business landscape to build a culture that not only attracts top talent but also brings out the best in them? This guide will answer these questions and more, offering you a comprehensive road map for building a culture of excellence and developing courageous leaders who inspire.

## INTO-THE-STORM MENTALITY

### Why the Buffalo?

In a world that often encourages us to take the path of least resistance, the buffalo symbolizes a transformative mentality. It's about creating a culture where challenges are not avoided but

embraced, where problems are not deferred but solved, and where the status quo is not accepted but questioned. This mindset can serve as the cornerstone of your organizational culture, setting the tone for how challenges, both big and small, are met. It's about fostering an environment where courage, quick decision-making, and direct engagement with challenges are the norm, not the exception.

### What Do We Mean by "Storms"?

#### Addressing Misaligned Behavior—

Taking the uncomfortable step to address behaviors that don't align with core values, even when it feels like it's not your place to do so.

#### Letting Go of a Toxic Top Performer—

Making the tough decision to part ways with a high-performing but toxic employee, even when you fear that results may initially suffer.

**Admitting and Owning Mistakes**—Taking ownership of mistakes not only builds trust but opens the door for others to be honest about their own.

### Self-Reflection: Recognizing Your Storms

**The "If Only" Moments**—Have you ever caught yourself thinking *If only I'd dealt with that sooner, it wouldn't have escalated into such a big issue?*

These are the storms you knew existed but chose to avoid, letting them grow into hurricanes.

**Fear-Induced Procrastination**—Are there challenges you've put off tackling because the fear seemed overwhelming, only to later realize that the situation wasn't nearly as bad as you'd built it up to be in your mind?

### Take the Next Step

Let this guide serve as a catalyst for courage. Use it to inspire you to charge into your storms, to face challenges head-on, and to transform them into opportunities for growth and improvement. Remember, unlike other animals, the buffalo doesn't avoid the storm; it charges into it, knowing that facing challenges head-on is the quickest path to blue skies.

## THE DELEGATION DILEMMA AND OTHER CHALLENGES: WORKING ON THE BUSINESS, NOT JUST IN IT

### Letting Go of the Vine

One of the most common challenges tree care owners face is the struggle with delegation. It's not that they don't understand its importance,



it's that they often fail to implement it effectively or simply don't believe it to be possible. This results in owners working *in* the business—caught up in the day-to-day operations—rather than working *on* the business to drive growth and innovation.

We operate on and implement something called The Entrepreneurial Operating System®, which provides a framework and tools to make effective delegation possible. But let's be clear: the tools are only as good as the hands that wield them. It's ultimately up to the leader to take this necessary risk. If you believe people will rise to the challenge and give them the opportunity to do so, they often will. The reverse is also true.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Read *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business* by Gino Wickman, which outlines the EOS® system.
- Do the Elevate & Delegate exercise to get better clarity on where you should be investing time.
- Cross-company and internal development programs are a great way to demonstrate your commitment to the long-term growth of team members, especially if they have the desire but lack the experience or skills. **Pro Tip:** There are usually state-funded grants available for this type of thing.

*The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.*  
—THEODORE ROOSEVELT

### Concerns About Succession Planning

Succession planning is often a topic that leaders avoid, either because it forces them to confront their own replaceability or because it seems like a distant issue that can be deferred. However, the reality is that succession planning is a critical aspect of long-term business sustainability. It's not just about identifying who will take the reins when you step down, it's about developing a deep bench of talented individuals who can step up to various leadership roles within the organization.

### Dealing with Long-Term yet Underperforming Employees

Long-term employees can be a valuable asset, bringing institutional knowledge and experience to the table. However,

longevity doesn't always equate to high performance. Addressing underperformance in long-term employees can be a sensitive issue, fraught with emotional and even legal complexities. Yet, avoiding the issue can send the wrong message to other employees and create a culture of complacency.

**Action Point:** Address underperformance head-on, even if it's uncomfortable, to maintain a culture of accountability and excellence. Avoiding this is a disservice not only to your other team members, but to the underperforming employees as well.

### BUILDING A PEOPLE-CENTRIC CULTURE: THE PATH TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

#### Indicators of a Strong Company Culture

**Alignment with Values**—When employees can see how their work aligns with the company's values, they are more engaged and motivated.

**Employee Engagement**—High levels of engagement often translate into increased productivity and lower turnover rates.

A strong company culture manifests in various ways, but perhaps the most telling is how employees behave when no one is watching. Do they go the extra mile? Do they treat each other with respect and kindness? These are the indicators of a culture that not only attracts top talent but also brings out the best in them.

#### Key Pillars of Company Culture

**Purpose and Values**—A strong culture is built on a clear sense of purpose and values. These aren't just words on a wall; they should guide every decision and action within the organization.

**Communication and Transparency**—Open communication is the lifeblood of a healthy culture. It's not just about sharing good news or financial reports but also about being honest when facing challenges.

**Leadership and Empowerment**—Leaders set the tone for the culture. Their behavior, decisions, and interactions with the team serve as a model for what is acceptable within the organization.

**Employee Well-Being**—A people-centric culture prioritizes the well-being of its employees, offering not just good compensation and benefits

but also opportunities for growth and development.

### Primary Channels for Culture to Thrive

- Onboarding and training
- Internal communication platforms
- Recognition and rewards
- Team-building experiences
- Leadership development

### THE NUANCES OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

When we talk about employee well-being, it's not a one-size-fits-all scenario, especially in a multigenerational workforce. Different people have different motivations and priorities. For some, an owner's effort to offer work flexibility—enabling someone to occasionally pick up their kids from school or attend a sporting event—could mean much more than higher wages or added mental health benefits.

We're quick to dismiss flexibility requests in this industry due to the nature of the job. But those who find creative solutions to these challenges differentiate themselves from the competition. The key is *you don't know unless you ask, and you shouldn't assume*. Make intentional efforts to build authentic trust, show vulnerability, and get to know their aspirations. It's an understated yet paramount piece of the puzzle.

**Actionable Insight:** Conduct regular one-on-one meetings to understand individual needs and motivations. A study done by one of our partners, HR Signal, saw that the largest positive change in retention risk came from "stay interviews" or informal well-being and job satisfaction checks.

**Book Recommendation:** *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni.

*Trust is knowing that when a team member does push you, they're doing it because they care about the team.*  
—PATRICK LENCIONI



## THE CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

### Stagnation and Lack of Innovation

When leaders are too involved in the day-to-day tasks, they often neglect the bigger picture, leading to stagnation and a lack of innovation. In today's fast-paced business environment, this can be fatal. Companies that don't innovate get left behind.

**Action Point:** Encourage networking events and other methods of continuous improvement, and offer incentives for those who take ownership to innovate.

### Weak Organizational Culture

A weak organizational culture can lead to many problems, including low employee morale, high turnover rates, and financial losses. It's like a ship with a hole—it might not sink immediately, but it's taking on water and will eventually go under if not repaired.

**Action Point:** Don't assume, ask. Validate your thoughts through frequent informal touch bases and employee feedback surveys.

### High Turnover Rates

High turnover rates are a symptom of deeper issues within the organization, such as a toxic culture or lack of career development opportunities. The costs of high turnover are not just financial but also include the loss of institutional knowledge and the negative impact on team morale.

**Action Point:** Implement employee retention strategies that focus on career development and job satisfaction.

## OPENNESS AND HONESTY: THE CORNERSTONES OF A HEALTHY CULTURE

### Providing Clear, Kind, and Direct Feedback

Another way leaders factor into both retention and a healthy culture is their ability, or lack thereof, to promote an open and honest environment. This includes explicit permission for employees to offer upward criticism and candor, so long as it's done with emotional intelligence and delivered with a combination of respect and kindness.

Once that expectation is set, it's far easier, but still just as important, for leaders to communicate with extreme clarity, directness, and compassion. In the healthiest organizations, accountability is something that's recognized by all as



a service to others. Nobody should ever have to guess where they stand or how they're doing. While feedback should happen in the moment whenever possible, that doesn't replace the need for quarterly conversations or annual reviews.

The best leaders master giving feedback in a way that combines compassion with directness, while many other well-intentioned leaders fall into "ruinous empathy," where they hold back criticism or pull punches, failing to realize that rather than an act of kindness this is actually a disservice to your people. If you care about someone, it is your responsibility to challenge them directly.

**Action Point:** Read "Radical Candor" by Kim Scott

*"If you don't genuinely care about the people you're leading, you will not be an effective leader. You might hit your numbers for a while, but over time you will fail."*  
—KIM SCOTT

## THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

### Improved Employee Engagement—

Engaged employees are the backbone of any successful organization. They are not just present but passionate about their work, leading to higher productivity and better customer service.

**Increased Retention Rates—**By focusing on culture and leadership development, you're not just making your employees happier, you're also making them more likely to stay. This is crucial for maintaining the long-term health of your organization.

**Enhanced Productivity—**A happy employee is a productive employee. By creating a work environment where people can thrive, you're setting your organization up for success.

**Better Customer Service—**Happy employees lead to happy customers. It's a simple equation but one that many organizations find hard to balance. Investing in your employees is indirectly investing in your customer service.

## YOUR FIRST STEP INTO THE STORM

Creating a healthy workplace culture and effective leadership is not a one-time effort but a continuous process. The key to long-term success lies in your ability to identify and courageously charge into your "storms," transforming challenges into opportunities for growth and improvement. By embracing this guide's principles, you're taking the first step toward transforming your organization into a place where people are excited to come to work and are empowered to contribute their best every day.

So I may not technically work in tree care, but this past year I fell in love with the industry. TCIA has been a client for a few years, and earlier in 2023 I had the opportunity to present at their Winter Management Conference in Barbados. Since then, I've learned more about the industry from owners, joined a peer group with those in the industry, and recently took part in Saluting Branches, where I met some incredible folks and learned more about the Executive Arborist Association. It's the authenticity of the people that make up this industry that keeps me coming back. I hope you found value in this article and that it serves as a catalyst for you to do something differently in pursuit of strengthening your workplace culture!

To keep sharpening your leadership tools, check out the *Into The Storm Leaders* podcast on the CultureShoc YouTube channel or wherever you already listen to your favorite podcasts. 🌳





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## Why Should I Take the Utility Vegetation Management Professional Certificate Program?

By Michael Neal, UVM Consultant

**T**he Utility Vegetation Management Professional Certification program is designed for individuals working within the utility industry who wish to develop and enhance their management knowledge and skills related to developing and implementing UVM programs. This program is a pathway for career development and advancement.

Who should participate in the UVM Program?

- ✓ A UVM manager who is responsible for one domain of the UVM plan and wants to explore other domains
- ✓ The crew supervisor or pre-inspector or utility forester who wants to advance to a management position implementing UVM plans
- ✓ A leader on the utility crew who the company wants to mentor and encourage to climb the ladder to a management position

I have had the privilege of facilitating some of the domains within the certification program. The students have been crew foremen, pre-inspectors, and managers of vegetation management programs. One of the most rewarding parts of the certification program is students getting to interact with the other participants across North America. They learn how their peers manage vegetation within the local utility.

Amanda Opp, from Flathead Electric Cooperative, who

manages the UVM program wrote:

The UVM Certification program has provided me the ultimate cornerstone to build my UVM career. The students I took the courses with taught me almost as much as the coursework itself. My end product was a workable vegetation management plan for my utility with a deep understanding of how to work the plan. I would encourage anyone who is thinking about this next step in their career to go for it—you will be so glad that you did.

Paul Wienecke, Forest Maintenance Manager for Clark Public Utilities, wrote:

I'm relatively new to the UVM industry, having only been in my role with the utility for about six years. When I learned about the UVM Professional credential through the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, I immediately saw it as a way to learn the management side of our business while bringing further credibility to our program. Once I started, the curriculum was challenging, I'll admit. But it forced me to analyze how I was doing things. It taught me how to be a more effective manager and the importance of a systems approach to my VM goals. The facilitators are all top-notch people and big names within our industry. My classmates stay in touch, and we often run into each other



at conferences and other industry events.

Was it a lot of work? Yes. Would I do it all over again? Absolutely! In my opinion, the various ISA Arborist certifications are essential for those of us dealing with challenges in the field. However, if you want to learn the best management practices for running a successful and efficient integrated utility vegetation management program, I highly recommend the UVMP credential from UW at Stevens Point.

I agree with Paul—it is a lot of work. This comprehensive training program is designed and facilitated by industry professionals who will lead you through the knowledge and skills needed to plan and manage sustainable UVM program plans. This UVM Professional program is earned by completing two certificates and a credential preparation course, which are project-based and 100% online. Courses are designed for applied learning for working professionals. There are no set days and times to engage with the course so participants can do the weekly course requirements on their own schedule.

The goal of the courses is to enhance the understanding and application of the industry's best practices beyond participants' current daily tasks, moving to understand and enact comprehensive utility vegetation management.

Once participants have completed the UVM Professional Certificate, they need to integrate the knowledge and skills from all the previous courses to create a UVM Program Plan. In the UVM Program Planning credential preparation course,

participants will do just that. While keeping safety, compliance, best practices, and ROW stewardship in the forefront, participants systematically utilize the program and project management processes, tools, and techniques to develop an effective, efficient, and sustainable UVM program plan based on integrated vegetation management best practices.

Once participants have completed the foundations of UVM certificate, the UVM Professional certificates, and the UVM Program Planning course, they are eligible to earn the Certified Utility Vegetation Management Credential. To be eligible, students also need two years of work-related experience, a membership in the UAA, and a commitment to the UVM Code of Ethics.

The completed UVM Program Plan will be reviewed by the UAA UVM Committee who will award the credential. Once the students develop their own UVM program, they present it to peers within their own organization or to the management team, followed by a presentation to the UAA UVM Committee.

For more information, visit the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Points website at [tinyurl.com/UVMPCredential](https://tinyurl.com/UVMPCredential) or the UAA website at [www.gotouaa.org/utility-vegetation-management-program](https://www.gotouaa.org/utility-vegetation-management-program). <sup>⌆</sup>



Annissa May



*Silver* LEVEL SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

## A Silent Force of Support: Annissa May

**A**nnissa May has served as a backbone of our organization since 1999. Joking that this dates her, May remembers the morning she perused the classifieds in the newspaper for job ads when she stumbled upon a position at ACRT. She applied on Monday, interviewed on Tuesday, received a job offer on Wednesday, and her first day was Thursday, November 18, 1999.

For nearly 20 years, May served in a role where she supported operations managers and field staff to ensure they were equipped to do their jobs safely and properly. In 2020, she transitioned roles and became ACRT Arborist Training's school director. As she did in 1999, May

jumped headfirst into this position and learned about arboriculture firsthand. She has attended ACRT Arborist Training classes, learned how to climb, and even hoisted 70 feet up in a bucket.

As the school director, May ensures that ACRT Arborist Training adheres to the regulations that are set by the Ohio Board of Career Colleges and Schools. That includes making sure all recordkeeping is correctly done and ensuring students know their rights, responsibilities, and expectations. In addition to those tasks that she refers to as an "ethical obligation," organizing courses across the country, and more, May was instrumental in overhauling ACRT Arborist Training's Line Clearance

Arboriculture Manual and introducing the Chainsaw Safety and Maintenance Handbook.

May shared, "The original book was written by Dick Abbott—a giant in this industry. He's no longer with us but still looms large in the industry. The 2005 edition was edited by two other industry giants, Peter Dubish and Jim Rooney. They're big, important, smart, kind, wonderful people. I hope the 2023 version echoes the original version, with the original voices still heard and appreciated."

People like Annissa May are the key to our success. Learn more about our family of dedicated employee-owners at [acrt.com](https://acrt.com). <sup>⌆</sup>



# Be PROACTIVE about Tribal Outreach

By M.K. Youngblood, Safety Manager and Tribal Liaison, ACRT Pacific

**W**hy is tribal outreach important while working in vegetation management? It fosters Tribal sovereignty, social responsibility and reputation, cultural sensitivity, collaboration, engagement, compliance with federal guidelines, and more. Overall, outreach to tribes is important for businesses working in VM to establish respectful and collaborative relationships with Native American Tribes, leading to more effective and sustainable VM practices that align with Tribal values and promote mutual benefits.

Tailoring outreach efforts to tribes is crucial for vegetation management companies to effectively engage in collaborative decision-making with Native American Tribes. Here are some ways our industry can tailor outreach efforts to tribes by being PROACTIVE.

## **P** PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRIBAL EMPLOYMENT

Providing opportunities for tribal employment, particularly through collaboration with Tribal Employment Rights Offices (TERO), represents a cornerstone in fostering meaningful tribal engagement and outreach. Tribal Employment Rights Offices serve as vital intermediaries, ensuring that tribal members gain access to employment opportunities that are both meaningful and sustainable within their own communities. This initiative transcends mere job creation; it becomes a catalyst for holistic community development.

Providing opportunities for tribal employment through TERO not only drives economic growth but also nurtures a symbiotic relationship between businesses and tribes. It fosters a sense of belonging, pride, and empowerment among tribal members, reinforcing the cultural fabric of Indigenous communities. This collaborative effort, grounded in respect and reciprocity, stands as a testament to the transformative power of meaningful employment in fostering genuine tribal engagement and outreach.

## **R** RESEARCH TRIBAL LOCALITIES AND ANCESTRAL HOMELANDS

Thorough research is the bedrock upon which effective tribal engagement is built. Businesses aspiring for genuine collaboration must invest time and effort to comprehend the intricate details of the tribes they aim to work with. One crucial aspect of this research involves determining whether the tribe is local or regional—understanding the geographical scope of their influence. Equally important is identifying the precise locations of their traditional ancestral homelands.

The investment in thorough research is not just an initial step but an ongoing commitment. It is the bridge that connects businesses with tribal communities on a deeper, more meaningful level. By demonstrating respect for tribal history and culture through this research, businesses pave the way for authentic partnerships, where the exchange is not just transactional but enriching for all parties involved.

## **O** OPPORTUNITY FOR FUTURE PROJECTS WITH THE TRIBE

Collaboration that transcends the boundaries of immediate projects is fundamental for building enduring relationships between businesses and tribal communities. Engaging in discussions and strategic planning for future endeavors showcases a business's dedication to long-term engagement. This forward-thinking approach transforms the nature of the relationship, positioning businesses as genuine partners in the progress and development of tribal communities.

By involving tribes in discussions about future projects, businesses send a powerful message: they are not merely interested in short-term gains but are invested in the sustained well-being and growth of the tribal community. Long-term engagement paves the way for innovative solutions to emerge. As businesses and tribes work together over an extended period, they develop a shared vision for the future. This collaborative vision often leads to creative and sustainable projects that have a lasting impact on the community, fostering self-reliance and resilience among tribal members.

## **A** ADVOCATE FOR TRIBAL COLLABORATION

Advocacy stands as a powerful catalyst in the realm of tribal engagement, shaping attitudes, policies, and perceptions within industries and communities. Businesses, therefore, bear a significant responsibility to actively promote the importance of tribal collaboration. By becoming advocates for respectful and meaningful engagement with tribes, these businesses initiate a transformative process that extends far beyond their immediate projects.

Remember, advocacy is not just a one-time effort; it is an ongoing commitment to promoting the values of respect, understanding, and collaboration. Businesses that advocate for tribal engagement contribute significantly to the creation of a more inclusive society where tribal communities are recognized, appreciated, and integrated into the social and economic fabric. Through their advocacy, these businesses play a pivotal role in fostering a future where partnerships between tribes and industries are not just common but are characterized by mutual respect, understanding, and shared prosperity.





M.K. Youngblood

## C CONSULT EARLY AND OFTEN

Frequent and early consultations, which may also be required by law, are the cornerstones of successful collaboration between businesses and tribal communities. Establishing a continuous line of communication from the outset is vital for building trust, preventing misunderstandings, and fostering a relationship built on mutual respect and understanding.

Developing projects that are culturally sensitive and mutually beneficial requires a collaborative mindset. Businesses must be willing to adapt their strategies based on the feedback and suggestions provided by tribal communities. By embracing a flexible and inclusive approach, businesses can create initiatives that align with the community's values and traditions, ensuring that the collaboration is not only successful but also sustainable in the long run.

## T TRUTHFUL IN WORDS AND ACTIONS

Honesty and transparency stand as the bedrock principles in the establishment of any successful partnership, especially when it comes to collaborations between businesses and tribal communities. In the context of engagements with tribes, these values are not just ethical imperatives but pivotal elements that lay the foundation for a relationship built on trust, integrity, and mutual respect.

Furthermore, in a climate of trust, challenges and conflicts can be addressed openly and resolved collaboratively. Honest communication allows both parties to navigate complexities and find mutually beneficial solutions. When businesses admit mistakes, learn from them, and adjust their strategies accordingly, it demonstrates a commitment to the relationship's integrity, reinforcing the trust between the parties involved.

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### Finding Success Through Safety and Service: Rian Owens

For three years, Rian Owens served as a youth pastor while moonlighting as a pest control technician. With the addition of a newborn baby, Owens and his wife took a leap of faith when he accepted a job at ACRT Pacific in 2016.

He remembers his supervisor at the time telling the group of new hires, "I know you guys are new, but as long as you work really hard and soak in everything you learn, there are lots of opportunities for growth and you will be successful." Owens quickly worked his way up to an assistant operations manager, and then was promoted to operations manager in 2023. He now oversees his first supervisor.



Rian Owens

For the past seven+ years, Owens has leaned into his role at ACRT Pacific noting, "If you work hard and give this company 100%, it will give 100% back to you."

Owens wears several other hats throughout our organization. Owens currently serves as the Chair of the ACRT Pacific Safety Committee, and in 2023 he was voted as a member of the ACRT Services Board of Directors. Whether it's serving as a voice for his fellow employees or ensuring the well-being of his peers, Owens makes sure to intertwine safety in everything he does.

Owens shared, "Safety to me is the most important part of our jobs. Above all, safety is the greatest thing that we need to focus on as an industry. We have a dangerous job, and getting to work safely and going home safely should be our top priority. It's the ultimate responsibility and I don't take it lightly."

People like Rian Owens are the key to our success. Learn more about our family of dedicated employee-owners at [pacific.acrt.com](https://www.pacific.acrt.com). 🌲





## I INCORPORATE TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Respecting and incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is not just a matter of cultural sensitivity—it is a fundamental step towards sustainable and ecologically responsible initiatives. Tribal communities, often deeply connected to their ancestral lands, hold a wealth of knowledge about their environment, acquired through generations of lived experience and close observation. This wisdom offers unique insights that can substantially contribute to the development of sustainable practices and environmental stewardship.

Incorporating TEK also promotes environmental justice. Indigenous peoples have historically been custodians of their lands, possessing an inherent understanding of the delicate balance between human activity and nature. By respecting and integrating their knowledge, businesses empower tribal communities, recognizing them as active agents in environmental conservation efforts. This empowerment is a step towards rectifying historical injustices and fostering a more equitable relationship between businesses and Indigenous populations.

## V VISIT THE TRIBES' BUSINESSES

Physical visits to tribal businesses stand as indispensable experiences for businesses aiming to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities. These visits provide a unique opportunity to go beyond surface-level understanding, offering firsthand insights into the operations, challenges, and cultural contexts of tribal businesses. Such visits not only demonstrate genuine interest but also pave the way for collaborations that are truly mutually beneficial and culturally sensitive.

By immersing themselves in the tribal community, businesses can learn about the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and values of the Indigenous people. This cultural understanding is pivotal in shaping collaborations that are culturally sensitive and respectful. It enables businesses to navigate interactions with cultural competence, avoiding inadvertent missteps and fostering an environment of trust and acceptance.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M.K. Youngblood serves as the Safety Manager and Tribal Liason at ACRT Pacific. He has more than 30 years of public service and first responder experience, with core proficiency in Indian law, Indian culture, and disaster cleanup. Youngblood also serves as a certified instructor for the U.S. Department of Energy (National Nuclear Security Administration and Center for Radiological Nuclear Training), U.S. Emergency Management Institute, and Center for Domestic Preparedness, and as the tribal secretary for the Haslett Basin Holkama Mono Tribe of Fresno County, California. For the past 12 years, he has led the California Tribal Emergency Response & Relief Agency (CAL TERRA) as its chief officer of emergency management. Most recently, Youngblood has given presentations for regional safety organizations, developed apprenticeship curricula for nationwide use in cultural conservation and environmental science, and has written peer-reviewed articles for safety in the utility industry. He is currently finishing a special bachelor's degree at California State University, Fresno in disaster archeology, natural, and cultural resources, with a minor in American Indian studies. 🌲

## E ENGAGEMENT ON ALL LEVELS

Engagement on all levels is the key to fostering enduring partnerships between businesses and tribal communities. To truly make a difference and create a positive impact, businesses must actively participate in tribal affairs at various levels, from grassroots community outreach programs to high-level governmental collaborations. This comprehensive approach not only demonstrates a commitment to the immediate projects at hand but also signifies a dedication to the overall well-being and empowerment of tribal communities.

By engaging comprehensively, businesses create a positive impact that extends far beyond immediate projects. They contribute to the overall development of tribal communities, fostering a sense of pride, self-determination, and resilience. Empowered communities are better equipped to address challenges, preserve their cultural heritage, and create a sustainable future for generations to come.

## BE PROACTIVE WITH A PURPOSE

Tribal engagement and outreach require a holistic approach grounded in fundamental principles of respect, honesty, advocacy, and active involvement. These guiding values form the essence of genuine collaboration between businesses and tribal communities. Respect ensures that cultural heritage is honored, traditions are preserved, and tribal wisdom is acknowledged. Honesty and transparency build trust, fostering open communication and understanding. Advocacy promotes the importance of tribal collaboration, encouraging broader societal acceptance and understanding. Active involvement, spanning from grassroots initiatives to policy-level discussions, cements the commitment to the well-being of tribal communities.

By adhering to these principles, businesses can form enduring partnerships with tribes that go beyond mere transactions. These partnerships are characterized by mutual respect, shared values, and a commitment to mutual prosperity. Such collaborations create a future where Indigenous knowledge is valued, where businesses and tribes work together in harmony, and where the outcomes benefit not only the involved parties but also society as a whole.

In this shared future, the strengths of both tribal communities and businesses are harnessed synergistically. Cultural diversity is celebrated, leading to innovative solutions and sustainable practices. Meaningful employment opportunities are created, contributing to economic development and social stability. Through these enduring partnerships, a legacy of collaboration, understanding, and mutual prosperity is established, serving as a beacon for future engagements between businesses and Indigenous communities worldwide.



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Game Lands 33 site in  
September 2013.  
*Photo courtesy of James W. Orr.*

# A Brief History of Integrated Vegetation Management: Part 2

## FACTS AND STORIES ABOUT THE EMERGENCE OF AN INDUSTRY

*By Geoff Kempter, Technical Services Manager, Asplundh*

**H**umans have been controlling unwanted vegetation as far back as the advent of agriculture, 11,000 or more years ago. For most of history, this was accomplished by manually cutting and pulling unwanted plants (Bell 2015). Today, the need to maintain corridors for transportation and to facilitate the delivery of reliable energy requires ongoing management of vegetation across a vast array of landscapes.

Coming up with the total acreage of managed rights-of-way is difficult; however, various estimates that include rail, pipeline, utility, and roadside (not including the actual roadbeds) place the amount of land in excess of 50,000,000 acres in North America (Egler 1975). This is an area the size of the U.S. state of Nebraska. Considering the scale, it is safe to say that the VM choices we make on these lands can promote greater biodiversity and improve overall health of ecosystems. This article provides a brief history of integrated vegetation management, its benefits, and prospects for its use in the future.

### EARLY VEGETATION CONTROL

Hoes, axes, saws, and plows pulled by oxen were the primary tools for controlling vegetation for centuries. Legendary accounts of “scorched earth” during warfare, where conquerors attempted to poison the land of vanquished peoples with “salt and ash” and sulfuric acid, are the earliest references to chemical vegetation control (Hallward 2008).

With the industrial revolution came the need to systematically control vegetation that interfered with rail and telegraph lines. By the mid-nineteenth century, steam-powered tractors and

crude chemical herbicides were developed and deployed in agriculture. In the twentieth century, as roads and railroads were improved and the electric and communication grid expanded, ROW corridors were established and needed to be maintained. Much work was done manually, but increasingly, mechanized methods were utilized. Rights-of-way vegetation managers experimented with chemical controls such as ammonium sulfamate, a contact herbicide; however, herbicide use was still confined mainly to agriculture (Extoxnet 1996).

### INTRODUCTION OF MODERN HERBICIDES

During World War II, classified research was conducted on advanced chemical formulations designed to destroy enemy crops. Though never used for this purpose, these products were released for commercial use after the war. The herbicides 2-4-D and 2-4-5-T, both selective for broadleaf plants, were widely used in agriculture and by the industry, including utilities, to control incompatible plants (Cobb and Reade 2010). Chemical companies soon released more specialized herbicides with varying properties, effectiveness, and selectivity. These products were eagerly adopted and widely deployed by ROW managers.

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

Ecologists had noted that certain plant communities inherently resisted the invasion of trees and that this natural phenomenon could be enhanced with minimal selective use of herbicides (Egler 1949). They proposed that such natural resistance could



be of great interest to ROW managers. Dr. Frank E. Egler, Dr. William Niering, and others decried what they perceived to be the overuse of chemical controls on ROW (Saxon 1997).

By the late 1950s—following a sharp decline of many animal species, including birds of prey such as the peregrine falcon and the bald eagle—the public became concerned about water and air pollution and the possible negative effect of pesticides on the environment (Egler 1975). Rachel Carson's best-selling book *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, documented the effects of DDT and other pesticides on birds and the environment. The book caused great concern, culminating in the banning of DDT in North America in 1972 and the worldwide banning of most persistent pesticides in 2004.

Farmers had been using biological, cultural, and physical controls for millennia (Bell 2015). In the wake of *Silent Spring*, the widespread use of synthetic pesticides and the negative consequences drove the development of "integrated control" and "pest management," both of which stressed reduction of pesticides applied through the understanding of natural pest cycles and existing biological controls. The term integrated pest management (IPM) eventually appeared in literature in 1972, and was used later that year by President Nixon in a letter to Congress (Kogan 1998).

Throughout the '60s, '70s, and '80s, a series of environmental incidents and disasters made headlines, including choking smog in major cities, rivers on fire, the spraying of the "defoliant" Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, and thousands of contaminated "Superfund" sites caused by "hazardous waste being dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed" (USEPA 2023). The costs, both in dollars and in human health and environmental impacts, resulted in a greater skepticism of herbicides and their use by the industry.

## DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

In the early 1980s, researchers in New York coined the term "integrated vegetation management," or IVM, to describe an approach that enhanced desired species and discouraged those

designated as incompatible. As with IPM, IVM accomplishes objectives by prescribing the optimal use of various management methods, including physical, chemical, cultural, and biological, on a site-specific basis, minimizing environmental and economic impacts, and considering the interests of all stakeholders. A key concept in IVM is the promotion of biological controls, which naturally resist the invasion of unwanted species, as described by Egler, Niering, and others decades earlier. In this way, IVM can be thought of as a subset of IPM, though the techniques and tools used vary considerably (Smiley 2023).

## GAME LANDS 33 SITE

In 1953, a research project was begun on an electric transmission ROW at State Game Lands 33 in Central Pennsylvania. The original purpose was to demonstrate the effects of herbicides on game species and their habitat (Johns 2015). Dr. William Bramble and Dr. W. Richard Byrnes, both from Penn State University at that time, were engaged as the lead researchers and would remain so for more than 50 years. Other initial cooperators included Pennelec (the local utility), a chemical company, Asplundh, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The project focused on the type of vegetative cover and wildlife habitat that developed following various ROW treatments, and whether that cover was compatible with ROW management objectives (Bramble 1967). Over the years, the project scope expanded beyond game species to include other wildlife, including songbirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, bees, and other pollinators. Dr. Egler, initially skeptical, eventually endorsed the project (Egler 1975).

Seventy years later, the project continues with lead researcher Dr. Carolyn Mahan of Penn State, and cooperators including FirstEnergy, Exelon, Asplundh, Corteva, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. The Game Lands 33 site, or simply "Bramble and Byrnes," is the longest and most comprehensive study of herbicide use on utility ROW ever undertaken. It has served as the basis for many other studies and demonstrations, including two sites in Brazil. To date, more than 200 scientific papers have been published, as well as



Early ROW maintenance was done largely by hand. Note the circular saw mounted on a tractor in the image on the right. Photos courtesy of Asplundh Tree Expert, LLC.



many articles in trade publications on a wide range of topics. In addition, many tours and visits have been arranged for industry groups, regulators, politicians, and other interest groups.

### THE 2003 BLACKOUT

On August 14, 2003, a transmission line in northern Ohio sagged into a tree. This began a cascading event that ultimately resulted in a power outage affecting more than 50,000,000 people in Eastern North America, including New York and Toronto, the largest cities in the United States and Canada (CBC 2003). Costs were estimated at U.S. \$7–14 billion (Hilt n.d.). While the official cause of the incident was attributed to a combination of factors, the fact that trees were involved generated unprecedented focus on utility vegetation management by the media, investigators, and regulators.

As a result of the blackout, Canada and the United States agreed to jointly regulate critical transmission lines through the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC). The North American Electric Reliability Corporation required transmission utilities to have a documented plan for managing vegetation, and authorized significant penalties for noncompliance or vegetation-caused outages (NERC 2014).

### DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS AND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES GUIDES

Up until that time, IVM was largely the realm of researchers. While some utilities utilized methods that could be characterized as IVM, at that time there was no standardized definition of the term. Meanwhile, North American utilities scrambled to comply with NERC requirements, often causing considerable public uproar as long-neglected and overgrown ROWs were “reclaimed.”

Recognizing that utilization of IVM could help utilities comply with NERC requirements, the Utility Arborist Association requested that the Accredited Standards Committee A300 (ASC A300) develop an American National Standard for IVM on electric utility ROW. The first ANSI standard for IVM was published in 2006. The following year, the ISA published a companion best management practices guide (Miller 2007).

These documents defined terms and methods and provided utilities with an opportunity to develop programs in compliance with published industry standards and BMPs.

In the 2018 revision, the ANSI A300 IVM scope no longer referred solely to electric utility ROW. In essence, this expanded the scope to include IVM in any location, including railroads, pipelines, roadsides, and ecosystem restoration. The International Society of Arboriculture’s IVM BMP was revised to reflect these changes in 2021. With scientifically sound, accurate information widely available, potential practitioners now had peer-reviewed information on IVM and how to implement it on all kinds of properties (Miller 2021).

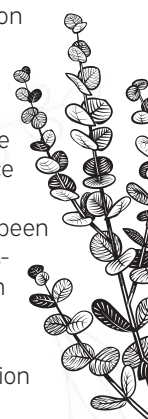
### IVM MOVING FORWARD

The principles of IVM have been understood since long before the term was coined, though serious research into the science behind ROW vegetation management did not take place until the mid-twentieth century. Since 1976, ongoing research has been presented regularly at the Environmental Concerns in Rights-of-Way Management Symposium series. The 14th symposium is scheduled for spring 2026, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The benefits of a ROW vegetation management program based on IVM are many. Research and multiple demonstration projects have shown that IVM programs are less costly and provide a range of environmental benefits, including a reduced carbon footprint. With the environmental and economic benefits of IVM now well established, and standards and BMPs in place, we can expect more potential end users to adopt the practice.

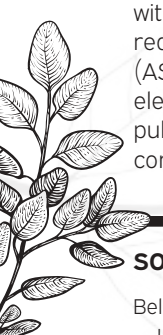
To that end, the Right-of-Way Stewardship Council documents and accredits North American pipeline and electric transmission utilities that practice sustainable resource management principles. Currently, nine utility companies are accredited from across North America (Right-of-Way Stewardship Council).

Additional advances in technology, including remote sensing and artificial intelligence, have the potential to further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of IVM programs. Today, with the benefits well-documented and the availability of standards, accreditations, best practices, and credentials, there is every reason for land managers to implement IVM.



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## SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

# Are We Ready for Generation Z?

By Stan Vera-Art, President, Grow With Trees

Less than 10 years ago, under Sara Sankowich's term as UAA president, we added **environmental sustainability** to the UAA's core values. We have come a long way in a short time. The Environmental Stewardship Committee, which started as a task force in 2017, is now one of the largest UAA committees. Environmental stewardship is no longer a question—it is part of everything we do. Increasingly, the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice intersect our work in the energy sector. This is paired with the growing demand to attract and retain a diverse and skilled workforce that can meet these needs, not to mention keep up with advancing technologies and help fill the knowledge gap as long-standing experts retire.

## ENTER GENERATION Z.

Gen Z, those born between 1995 and 2010, is not only the first generation entirely shaped by the digital age, they are also heavily values-driven, with an eye towards sustainability. According to Deloitte Global's "2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey," sixty percent of Gen Z respondents have felt anxious about the environment over the last month, and more than two-thirds are actively trying to minimize their impact on the environment. Also dubbed the "True Gen," given their truth-seeking tendencies, Gen Z expects businesses to do more to address environmental concerns while, at the same time, being highly sensitive to fake sustainability marketing and greenwashing. The same

survey showed that more than half of Gen Z job seekers research a company's environmental impact and policies before accepting a job from them.

As increasingly more threatened and endangered species—both plants and animals—seek refuge on well-managed utility rights-of-way, the opportunities to steward biodiversity amidst a changing climate and to attract the next generation of passionate vegetation managers are apparent. Those utilities that favor environmental stewardship of their managed lands will attract the talent needed to comply with current regulations, anticipate the changing regulatory environment, and continually improve sustainable business practices for generations to come. 🌱



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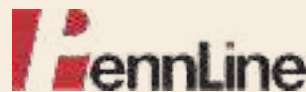
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We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2022 PinE Award Recipients.

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Heather Steranka



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## The Intersection of Safety, Inclusivity, and Leadership

By Heather Steranka, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Lewis Services

The weekly Safety Call at Lewis is much more than a recurring calendar event. Attended by team members from across the country, this important meeting serves as a virtual Venn diagram where leaders from different regions, departments, and areas of expertise intersect in a digital learning space to share best practices, examples, and information about workplace safety. These meetings are highly anticipated, with 100+ participants from frontline leadership to corporate executives. Actual stories from the field make them must-attend events.

During a recent call, a general foreperson (GF) from New Jersey was highlighting the importance of conducting thorough site inspections prior to beginning work in the field, when I was struck by the weight of his words. The GF emphasized that *every person on the site*—from the newest apprentice to most seasoned foreperson—should look at the job site *together*, because they may each notice different things. While inspections are a standard practice, his words resonated deeply with me as director of diversity, equity, and inclusion as they underscored the significance of diverse perspectives. Without realizing it, he had called out one of the biggest benefits of diversity in teams. In fact, there are years of research from well-respected organizations, like McKinsey and Deloitte, which have shown that diverse teams inspire diverse perspectives, increased innovation, and lead to better business performance. And in the vegetation management industry, this diversity leads not only to better performance but also to increased safety.

### INHERENT AND ACQUIRED DIVERSITY

Harvard Business Review defines two kinds of diversity: *inherent* and *acquired* (Hewlett et al. 2013). **Acquired diversity** is what the GF from New Jersey was talking about: the diversity of experience and training. There is also **inherent diversity**, which includes age, gender, race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, etc. Inherent diversity is what most people think of when they hear about diversity. However, the presence of *both* kinds of diversity on teams and in leadership is where we see the real benefits.

That said, diversity for the sake of diversity is not enough. To fully embrace and leverage diversity, we need to cultivate inclusive leaders who can harness the power of diversity to drive results. This means our leaders must develop the ability to lead people of different backgrounds and create environments where everyone feels encouraged, engaged, and knows that their perspectives are welcomed.

Most of us like to think that we are naturally inclusive leaders, but in fact inclusion is an active process that we have to work on every day (Ferdman 2013). Being an inclusive leader challenges

us to value ourselves and others because of—not despite—our differences (or similarities). It is leadership that works to ensure *all* team members feel respected, valued, and treated fairly. Inclusive leadership is not a big, grand gesture; it is the ongoing, regular, smaller-scale comments and actions that over time will yield results (Bourke and Titus 2019).

### BUILDING EMPATHY

At Lewis, we are continuously working to develop and build a stronger culture and more inclusive leaders. Last summer, Vice President of Information Technology Huntley Hedrick took the concept of “walk a mile” to a new level and asked his team from the corporate office to work from their cars for a full day and experience what it’s like to be a remote employee in a distributed network environment (Ghent and Hedrick 2023). Because of this exercise, corporate office employees improved their ability to be empathetic as they experienced some of the challenges that our field employees encounter every single day. There’s no better way to build empathy than by literally experiencing what it’s like to walk in someone else’s shoes—and empathy is a critical skill for inclusive leaders.

### WALK THE TALK

Fostering an equitable, respectful, safe culture is never easy. With a richly diverse workforce, where communication and trust are imperative for maintaining safety, it is incumbent upon us to create and sustain the most inclusive culture possible for our employees and those we serve. From field research, we know



In a “walk a mile” exercise, a team from the corporate office was instructed to work from their cars for a full day and experience what it’s like to be a remote employee in a distributed network environment. Photo courtesy of Lewis.



that people notice if they don't belong, or if they're made to feel like they don't belong, and they are less likely to speak up if they see something unsafe at a jobsite (Druley 2020).

In a recent interview, Lewis Board Member Manny San Miguel highlighted the importance of taking deliberate steps to create and maintain a culture that is inclusive, welcoming, and supportive for all (Murray and San Miguel 2023). Not just on paper, the true commitment to diversity and inclusion is knowing that "walk the talk" is an investment in teams and resources to keep employees safe. It happens when people from diverse backgrounds feel included and engaged. And it is manifested in diversity at all levels of the organization, and opportunities for growth for all. Because at the intersection of the Venn diagram lies the most valuable resource: **people**.

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## BUILDING THE CASE FOR DIVERSITY

In November 2018, the Associated General Contractors of America published a report on the business case for diversity and inclusion in the construction industry. They shared empirical evidence that proves the value of a diverse and inclusive work environment on safety, productivity, innovation, and retention—all of which improve the bottom line.

In a 2020 *Safety+Health* magazine article, Lorraine M. Martin, National Safety Council president and CEO, shared her thoughts on the importance of making DE&I part of an organization's fabric and value system (Druley 2020).

"In the safety world, we know we must walk the walk every day, and our commitment to safety has to be real," Martin said. "When you look out for your colleagues, you're helping to keep them safe. DE&I is a safety issue. People need to feel included and part of the team, because everyone has rich experiences that make their perspectives both valuable and unique." 🌱

## Silver LEVEL SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT



### Lewis' 2023 Fleet Stewardship Award Recipients

When Lewis leaders gathered for their Annual Leadership Conference, the two-day agenda was packed with robust strategy discussions, learning sessions, and the highly anticipated announcement of the 2023 Fleet Stewardship Award. Initiated by Senior VP of Operations Support Chad Fay, the Fleet Stewardship Award was founded in 2022 to inspire exceptional stewardship of Lewis fleets and recognize those who have achieved industry excellence.

"Being selected as the recipient of Fleet Stewardship Award is not an easy feat," explained Fay. "From a quantitative standpoint, we have established rigorous metrics related to compliance scores, inspections, utilization rates, and driver qualifications. But it's not just about numbers; recipients of this award are leading by example.

They're constantly innovating. And they consistently lead with a 'WE, not me' approach."

That's a high bar to reach, but this year's award recipient, **Brian Fuegen**, has continuously met—and surpassed—those benchmarks. During the past year, Fuegen's leadership has resulted in a fleet score of 99%, consistently high levels of asset utilization, zero OOS violations, and exemplary levels of driver compliance. With nearly 25 years of experience in the industry, Fuegen has risen through the ranks at Lewis and now serves as a Division Manager. Fuegen credits Lewis for fostering a culture of learning and opportunity, and believes that the organization's improvement mindset encourages employees to be problem solvers for their teams and customers.

"Since joining the Lewis team in 2005, I have been given incredible opportunities to learn, grow, and advance," Fuegen shared. "Lewis' investment in my career has motivated me to serve in a way that inspires leadership and success at all levels. Receiving the 2023 Fleet Stewardship Award is an incredible honor that I share with my team and the Lewis leaders who have supported me along the way." 🌱



Brian Fuegen, Eric Newman, and Chad Fay (left to right).



## What Is a Utility Arborist?

[illegible]

required, a minimum of 18 months of on-the-job training, your employer will review your recorded training hours and assess your competencies. Upon employer approval, they will change your status from a Utility Line Clearance Trainee to a Qualified Line Clearance Arborist.

## California Community College's Workforce Development

on-the-job training. The robust program is offered in eleven colleges throughout California, with more than 50 graduations and 583 graduates.

Additionally, in 2020, a two-week, 80-hour pre-inspector program was developed at Butte College to give the trainee the skills to do Level I tree risk assessments, identify tree work to maintain regulatory compliance, and to create electronic work orders for tree crews to perform line clearances work. This program has celebrated more than 22 graduations with nearly 300 graduates in nine community colleges throughout California.

Special thanks to Pacific Gas & Electric Company and San Diego Gas & Electric's commitment to workforce training programs by including the program in wildfire mitigation plans and financial investment. The utilities for national industry collaboration includes eleven UpSkill California Community College Workforce training units, Butte College, UAA, TCIA, ISA, utility contractors, California municipal and investor-owned utilities, and California workforce development state agencies.



*Photos courtesy of Larry Abernathy and Butte College program instructors*



### What Does a Utility Arborist Career Path Look Like?

This 7-step career path to success is a process of continual education over a lifetime. The following shows a potential path:

1. **Pre-Employment**—California community colleges' training programs
2. **First 2 Years**—Employer Training Program and JATC Certification Program
3. **After 1.5 years**—ISA Climber Specialist/Aerial Lift Specialist
4. **After Year 3**—ISA Certified Arborist
5. **Between Year 3–5**—After becoming ISA Certified, Utility Specialist, Tree Risk Assessment Qualified, and TCIA Certified TreeCare Safety Professional
6. **After 4 to 5 Years**—Utility Vegetation Management Certificate Program (University of Wisconsin)

### 7. After Obtaining Certifications, Continuing Education Units (CEUs)—

To maintain earned certifications, CEUs will be needed to maintain them. CEUs are available in many ways, such as webinars, conferences, registered employer training, etc.

### Sustainability and Growth

The next phase of our journey is maintaining and expanding the standardized training program beyond the eleven California community colleges, training a pipeline of new workers to support employers with skills training for their existing employees on their workforce. Current funding from Pacific Gas & Electric Company and San Diego Gas & Electric Company carries the foundation through 2024, and federal "Resiliency in Forestry Careers, Good Jobs Challenge" funds Northern California through 2026.

What's next? The UpSkill California Community College Workforce Training units are focusing proposals that support the California Community College Chancellor's Office Vision 2030, bringing economic mobility for special populations to gain skills and employment earning high-wage jobs. In addition, UpSkill California will leverage their allocation of California Labor and Workforce Agency Employment Training Panel funds, an Employment Training Tax (ETT), paid for by California employers who participate in the Unemployment Insurance system, to fund upskill training for new-hire pipeline and incumbent workers.

### Collaboration and Sharing the Arborist and Pre-Inspector Training with Other Educational Institutes

When the UAA was approached to assist in the development of arborist training in the summer of 2019 with Butte College, a goal was set to assist establishing standardized arborist training in California, and then spread it to the nation. Please contact the UAA if you know of an educational entity interested in bringing this training to your area. ☎



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# Mechanized Vegetation Management Technologies

By Duane S. Dickinson, Lead Vegetation Strategy, National Grid



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This is the second article in a three-part series about the topics covered at the **2023 UAA System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit** in Akron, Ohio, hosted by FirstEnergy. This is an exclusive UAA Member event, tailored for electric utility employees who are system level managers with responsibilities and experience in developing and managing the entire scope of their company's vegetation management program—with the goal of bringing back intuitive ideas, concepts, and solutions to their organizations.

Our society continues to change, and the skilled labor force available to perform vegetation management work appears to be dwindling. The loss of skilled labor has been a significant cost driver to utilities and to vendor tree companies that perform utility line clearance activities. This change in our society has been occurring slowly over time. In some regions of the U.S., it occurred more rapidly than in others. Utilities in southern regions were forced some time ago to look for other innovative ways to perform vegetation management along their utility corridors utilizing mechanical methods. Mechanical vegetation management is not a new concept; however, it is new to some regions of the U.S. where, fortunately, there had been a repository of skilled labor. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 appears to have caused a rapid decline in the available workforce across the U.S. and has left many utilities with the difficult task of completing critical vegetation management for the reliability of their systems with a reduced labor force. This brings us to the topic of this discussion: mechanized vegetation technologies.

At this year's UAA Utility Vegetation Managers Summit meeting in Akron, Ohio, Hal Acree (Progress Rail) presented attendees with a variety of mechanical mowers, production trimmers, and tree handler machines that are available in today's industry. With the variety available, there is now a machine for almost every job or situation—from 30,620 lb. operating weight track trimmers, remote-controlled adjustable leg back yard trimmers, and barge-mounted swamp trimmers all the way to helicopter side trimmers. This variety of trimmers is estimated to produce 5 to 10 times the work in a day compared to traditional methods of climbing or pruning out of aerial lift trucks.

Pruning or trimming is only one component of mechanical vegetation management. Mowing and brush or debris management is more commonly used by utilities even if they are not performing mechanical trimming. Mechanical mowers have evolved into several varieties over the years. There are 32,000 lb. articulating rubber tire mulchers, 20,000 lb. medium-size track-style mulchers on skid steers, to 3,351 lb. remote-controlled mulchers. Each piece of equipment has a different purpose and can be very efficient if used in the proper job location.

The breakout discussions about mechanized vegetation covered an array of topics. Topics included public notification, the need for utilities to have clear policies and procedures, safety for workers and the public, flexibility that is available to vendors, and many of the pros and cons associated to production, trimming quality, environmental concerns, and customer perception, just to name a few.

Often the use of mechanical means to manage vegetation is resource-driven. In most recent years, many utilities have changed their



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specifications to allow tree vendors to utilize boom-mounted saw equipment and aerial trimming methods rather than manually climbing trees. When mechanized means are correctly utilized, there can be a significant increase in production, which in the long run saves the utilities' and their customers' costs. Additionally, vegetation maintenance work can be performed with fewer skilled laborers, and it is safer to trim mechanically than to have laborers manually climb trees.

It was noted in the breakout discussions that the Z133 mechanical trimming standards have removed the language which states that mechanical trimming should be limited to remote locations. Therefore, the utility should make clear specifications as to what types of equipment can and cannot be used in certain areas. Specifications need to cover notification expectations to communities and customers; environmental expectations, including restrictions of rare and endangered species; and responsibility of any property damage due to use of mechanical equipment.

The safety of workers and the public should be thought through prior to using the equipment. Spotters need to be used to prevent others from entering drop zones of mechanical trimmers. Falling debris can slide down booms and/or bounce off equipment. When using mulching equipment, ANSI standards recommend "Follow Manufacturer's Instructions." Some manufacturers label the equipment, while others do not provide any recommended safe distances to remain from active operations. Many tree vendors add or have their own safety standards. As a utility, be sure you know the expectations of your vendors as well as the manufacturer's recommendations—

the standards can vary greatly.

Training of equipment operators varies with manufactures and equipment types. Some tree vendors provide their own training while others utilize training programs provided by manufacturers. Either method can work, but training how to use these machines and what their capabilities and limitations are is essential. Utilities may want to request outlines of training that have been provided to operators before allowing the use on the electric rights-of-way to ensure operators have the skills needed to perform the work.

There are many additional pros and cons to using mechanical vegetation management methods. It is not possible to outline all of them in one article. Each utility should evaluate the value and the risk associated with these methods and determine what will work best to meet their goals.


The UVM industry has come a long way in the past 30–40 years. Much of what we have covered in this article has more than likely triggered more questions than answers. We suppose this is good because as our industry continues to change and evolve, we need to keep asking the hard questions so we can continue to improve our vegetation management programs by being more efficient, provide the most reliable product possible, and create a pleasant experience for our customers at the lowest possible cost to our them and the environment.

Presently, there are variations of accepted safety practices around mechanical equipment and it has caused confusion within the industry. Stay tuned for a future follow-up article on standardizing the industry safety practices related to mechanized vegetation practices. 🌳

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# IBEW Local 17 Leverages Its History to Build Michigan's Utility Arboriculture Workforce, Today

By Mike Pittman, Assistant Business Manager, IBEW Local 17

All photos courtesy of IBEW Local 17.

**F**ounded in 1892 by nine City of Detroit linemen, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 17 has proudly been a leading force for improvement in the trade. At its inception, Local 17 partnered with the Detroit Electric Light and Power Company, known today as DTE Energy, and together set Detroit and the surrounding communities on a path of growth and advancement of electrification. Their collaboration leveraged the turn-of-the-century technological boom, out of which grew a highly skilled local workforce to build electric telecommunications and rail systems, of which much is still in use today.

Pivotal to Local 17's success was the early establishment of an apprenticeship system, which an 1893 article from *The Detroit Free Press* explained was "not only of service to the members of the union but of material benefit to the company which employs the men." A locally trained union workforce assured companies of stable, skilled talent and simultaneously protected the union members who executed the work. As a result, Detroit and metro Detroit experienced tremendous growth and modernization. In tandem, Local 17's commitment to passing on hard-earned craftsmanship expertise to the upcoming generation was born.

For decades union membership grew, with senior members mentoring the upcoming generation. Elders shared their knowledge, which the youth paired with new techniques and technology that continuously advanced the utility arboriculture trade. Fast forward to 2008, the global economic crash wreaked havoc across Michigan, which merely added to the deep financial hardship of the decade prior. With globalization and decades of disinvestment in infrastructure, most urban-based industry and skilled trades jobs left Detroit. It was at this juncture when Local 17 envisioned a line clearance apprenticeship program as a shared investment by the union, the membership, and business. If the union, the Local 17 membership, and business all contributed to the program, they

could create a similar win-win strategy to that which was built a century before. So together, with utility partners and line clearance companies, Local 17 built one of the first U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)-registered utility arboriculture apprenticeship programs.

Today, utilities DTE Energy, ITC, Thumb Electric, and Wyandotte Municipal Electric along with line clearance companies, such as Asplundh, Davey, Kappen, Urban, and Wright Tree Service, are continuing to recruit, train, and equip local Detroit and metro Detroit talent for a century-old, in-demand union career. Local 17's apprenticeship program spans two-and-a-half years, with journeyman cardholders accruing 5,000 hours of on-the-job learning with line clearance companies who service each of the utilities' infrastructure within their respective territories.

Apprentices begin earning their hours after successfully completing a nine-day immersive learning boot camp at Local 17's new training facility in Wales, Michigan. Students are introduced to climbing, knot tying, tree identification, safety, and industry best practices.

"One of the goals here is to give them enough experience so they can make

an educated choice as to whether this is really for them or not. It's a game changer for sure and has allowed us to set the bar on training and consistency of knowledge throughout our workforce here at Local 17. What we have here is a means to raise the bar in our industry," said Local 17 Line Clearance Apprentice Instructor Winston Likert.

After completing bootcamp, apprentices advance every six months, with 1,000 hours of on-the-job training in addition to fulfilling one day of in-person related technical instruction (RTI) monthly. Local 17 line clearance apprentices use the Canvas online learning management system, which is the same platform many students use to earn a college degree, to earn their journeyman card. Assignments begin at the basic level and advance as the apprentice progresses and gains more knowledge.

The apprenticeship curriculum, assignments, and testing provide comprehensive industry knowledge that successfully positions apprentices to earn their journeyman card and attain additional certifications upon completion of Local 17's program.

One participant said, "After completing



Apprentice class group photo.



A woman with blonde hair in a braid, wearing a black helmet and safety glasses, is working on a tree. She is wearing a red shirt and is secured by ropes and harnesses. The background shows green leaves and a clear blue sky.

# WE EMPOWER TREE CARE PROFESSIONALS.

Photo credit: Johan Östberg

TREE Fund directly supports the critical work of utility arborists by offering research grants, scholarships, and educational programs for the skilled professionals who care for our national power grid and the millions of customers who depend on them.

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*Local 17 Apprentice Instructor Alex Keller introduces utility arboriculture trade to Oakland Technical School students.*

the apprenticeship, I had the safety training and knowledge to successfully pass the ISA Certified Arborist exam. I hope to inspire my peers to become an ISA Certified Arborist, and I am assured of passing on industry and safety best practices to the Local 17 apprentices I am mentoring today."

Today, Local 17 has 200 apprentices moving through the program to join a Michigan workforce, numbering approximately 800 utility arborists.

In tandem with building a highly skilled workforce, Local 17's apprenticeship program offers additional benefits, particularly financial, to utility arboriculture companies and apprentices. Companies participating in a DOL-registered apprenticeship can apply for and receive funding through State Apprenticeship Expansion (SAE) grants, which tap into federal resources deployed at the state level. Kappen Tree Service was the first of Local 17's utility arboriculture partners to leverage the opportunity.

Jason Kappen, co-owner of Kappen Tree Service, said, "In addition to how it is recognized, a DOL-registered apprenticeship program provides numerous advantages, from the high level of training, quality of our workforce, to the pride the apprentices have. What's helped our company immensely is working closely with Michigan Works! on special training grants to provide the funding needed to fully support the apprentices."

Local 17 DOL apprentice program participants qualify for Michigan Works! SAE grant funds to apply to their CDL training and testing. This removes the financial barrier that has historically prevented many apprentices from attaining this vital license and ensures they are full participants on the crew and in the company's field work.

Local 17 supports veteran apprentices

to apply their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs to receive housing allowance and to purchase their learning materials.

"Being a part of the apprenticeship has been one of the most impactful career moves in my life, and my VA benefits supplemented my earnings as I worked to achieve my Local 17 journeyman card. Having a stable income and great benefits for myself and my family as well as a retirement I can invest in has been life changing, and allowed me to successfully transition to civilian life after my years of military service," said IBEW Local 17 Journeyman and ISA Certified Arborist Corey Boerner.

Concurrently, Local 17 has created several talent development streams to inform, recruit, and prepare candidates ranging from high school student engagement events, one-day immersive learning camps, to pre-apprenticeship programs. Local 17 members engage directly with high school students at career awareness events held across three counties surrounding Detroit to share the skilled trades career opportunities available, and how being part of a union offers assured security and career advancement. Area youth are becoming increasingly interested in career pathways outside of attending college, especially with the growth in organized labor movements in Detroit.

In addition, Local 17 and DTE Energy provide immersive learning to students attending Oakland Schools Technical Campuses, which offers high schoolers the opportunity to graduate with both their diploma and industry certifications. Unique to Local 17 and DTE Energy are their two tree trim training programs, created in partnership with government and nonprofit entities. The first, launched in 2019, is a tree trim training program at the Michigan Department of Corrections' (MDOC) Parnall Correctional Facility's Vocational Village. The second is the

Detroit-based Tree Trim Academy.

DTE Energy Tree Trim Manager Terrell Lockhart said, "By engaging the eager, diverse talent in the Detroit and metro Detroit areas to join our tree trim training programs, we are increasing the diversity in the teams who service DTE's customers and communities."

Not only do these programs serve as talent pipelines, but they also bring diverse, local talent into our line clearance apprentice program. Equally important, local Michiganders are joining our utility arboriculture workforce. By training and hiring local talent, their earnings go back into our state's economy through home ownership and purchasing local goods and services, as opposed to traveling talent that often sends money back to wherever they call home.

Similar to Local 17's harnessing of the electrification boom at the turn of the twentieth century, today we are leading Michigan's electrification and modernization efforts as we transition to a clean energy future. And just as our apprenticeship program rose to meet the needs a century ago, our program today is doing the same by recruiting, training, and equipping local talent to serve our Michigan communities alongside our utility partners.

As the nation's reliance on energy stability and reliability has steeply increased over the last five years, maintaining the vegetation that encroaches upon critical electrical infrastructure becomes all the more important. Local 17 stands ready to assist any utility or line clearance company to partner with their local IBEW union to develop their own DOL-registered utility arborist apprenticeship program in their region of the country. Working together will create the safest, most productive, and professional utility arboriculture workforce to power our country's communities now and into the future. 🌱



*IBEW Local 17 training property in Wales, Michigan*





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## Empowering Women in Utility Vegetation Management:

By Amanda Opp, Certified Utility Vegetation Management Professional, Flathead Electric Cooperative

It is an honor and pleasure for me to write about the experience at the Women in Utility Vegetation Management Workshop. The backdrop for this year's workshop was Pittsburgh, the "Steel City," at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. The conference center is surrounded by bridges and the bustle of an industrial city, and the Allegheny River and Monongahela River converge at Pointe State Park to form the Ohio River just blocks away. Across the river is a gorgeous view that first-time visitors may not expect but was a pleasant surprise. The setting was the perfect backdrop to kick off the 2023 Trees & Utilities Conference, and the cornerstone Women in Utility Vegetation Management Workshop event.

The morning was abuzz with anticipation and enthusiasm as the four-hour workshop commenced, drawing in a diverse array of individuals from various levels within their respective organizations. The diverse composition of the attendees, hailing from different backgrounds and professional experiences, created a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere that encouraged open dialogue, shared learning, and meaningful collaborations, irrespective of hierarchies or industry backgrounds.

With the support of our esteemed sponsor, Pennline, the event kicked off with an insightful message shared by entomologist

Dr. Anand Persad. Chair of the UAA Research Committee, Dr. Persad has focused on creating partnerships with other organizations to build on and leverage cross-industry research and enhancing funding opportunities, and has been an avid researcher and educator in the field of arboriculture in a changing world for more two decades. He

currently leads the Research, Science, and Innovation (RSI) team at ACRT Services.

Dr. Persad spoke about "Science as a Currency for Equity and Diversity in UVM." His comprehensive understanding of the

field brought forward a discourse emphasizing the paramount importance that our mental state has on our ability to swing between cognizant and emotional states, and how that will influence how safe we are in our day-to-day activities. Driven by his scientific insights, his message underscored the necessity for furthering engagement in the industry from the women in UVM by also helping to address gaps for the advancement of science, especially emerging challenges, including mental health, safety, and equality.

Susan Rossbach is a STEM mentor, employer, and board member who encourages young women to work in nontraditional roles, particularly engineering, construction, and technology. Rossbach has a background in engineering and likes to solve tough problems with cool tools. This year, I have seen her dressed as a superhero sharing her passion for drones and life. She has been an engaged member of the Women in Utility Vegetation Management Workshop and even participated on a panel at the event in 2022. She opened by telling the group about her experience in the industry and encouraged attendees to look for mentorship opportunities to support other women starting out in the industry.

Rossbach's unrelenting passion for continuous learning and her substantial involvement in the realms of STEM served as an inspiration for the attendees of the workshop and colleagues in the UVM industry. Through her trailblazing venture, Brains4Drones, she not only symbolized her relentless pursuit of innovation but also has stood as a beacon of support for women navigating the terrain of the technology sector. Her empowering words echoed across the room, igniting a sense of determination and resilience among the aspiring attendees present, urging them to shatter constraints and challenge traditional norms within the UVM sector.

The heart of the event resounded profoundly through the





## The Path to Intersectional Design and Equity in the Workplace

joint presentation delivered by the dynamic and insightful duo, Cindy Joseph and Britba Bennett from The Cee Suite, whose mission is to promote social progress by building equitable and inclusive workplaces. Their captivating and thought-provoking session about “Designing for Intersectionality” was very human-centered and encapsulated the very essence of the workshop, unraveling the complex tapestry of identities that define and shape our experiences. Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals holding marginalized identities, Joseph and Bennett emphasized the pressing need to prioritize the most vulnerable within any organizational framework. Their deep-seated insights through the lens of intersectionality illuminated the path toward, fostering a more inclusive, empathetic, and nurturing workspace—paving the way for a more equitable and diverse workforce within the UVM industry.

The presentation provided a new perspective on the impact of intersectionality within contemporary society and our industry. Delving into the intricate web of compounded oppressions faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities within institutional frameworks, the session shed light on the urgent need to acknowledge and address the intricate challenges faced by these communities. With a focus on interactive



group exercises and fundamental core concepts, the session fostered an environment that celebrated diversity and promoted equity among all participants, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds or positions within their respective organizations.

Throughout the workshop, the learning objectives were carefully

interwoven into the fabric of each segment, emphasizing the critical importance of comprehending the complexities of intersectionality within the workplace. Participants were encouraged to recognize the pivotal significance of challenging

and dismantling existing systems of oppression, thus fostering a more inclusive, empowering, and equitable environment for all individuals within the UVM industry. The extended duration of the workshop facilitated in-depth discussions, engaging group activities, and practical exercises, enabling participants to apply intersectional design principles to their specific organizational challenges, nurturing a deeper understanding of the significance of equitable access and outcomes within the UVM sector.



The sold-out workshop, which garnered an enthusiastic and passionate participation of 80 attendees, serves as a powerful testament to the growing recognition of the paramount significance of intersectional design and equity within the realm of utility vegetation management. This remarkable turnout stands as a compelling testament to the commitment of industry professionals and stakeholders, showcasing their shared dedication to embracing a more inclusive and diverse approach, ensuring that the principles of equity and intersectionality remain firmly and irrevocably ingrained at the forefront of UVM's continual journey forward.

The remarkable success of the event would not have been possible without the relentless efforts and unwavering dedication of our esteemed volunteers on the Women in Utility Vegetation Management Committee. Their passion and commitment to fostering an inclusive and empowering community has been instrumental in driving the success of the workshop. Through their steadfast and tireless efforts in championing the voices and contributions of women in UVM, they have firmly laid the foundation for meaningful progress and transformation within the industry. Their invaluable contributions stand as a shining example of the collaborative spirit and dedication that continues to propel the field of UVM toward a more equitable, inclusive, and promising future. 🌱

# Developing a Learning Culture through Human and Organizational Performance

By Paul Hurysz, Manager–UVM Safety Consulting, Davey Resource Group

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These are transformational times when it comes to managing organizational philosophies and expectations. Leadership from both utilities and service providers are (or should be) intensively focused on how to better mitigate or minimize unwanted outcomes within their organizations. Historically, in our industry, most organizations utilize a behavior-based safety (BBS) philosophy for managing their safety outcomes. If the goal requiring improvement is minimizing serious injury/fatalities (SIF) and improving employee retention in tight labor markets, we need to consider changing to an alternative philosophy to achieve improved results: Human and Organizational Performance (HOP).

We have grown accustomed to recognizing the worker as the problem when bad things happen, seeing failure as poor performance, promoting “zero” as the only acceptable outcome, and teaching organizations that information is best when it flows from the top down. This effort has also accomplished little with regard to improving employee retention and engagement within a tight and unpredictable labor market. With that said, to some degree, BBS did accomplish some good things—non-fatal injuries declined, initially. However, that trend has begun to slow. With SIFs, or those we would consider life-altering injuries, we have failed to move the needle in a positive way.

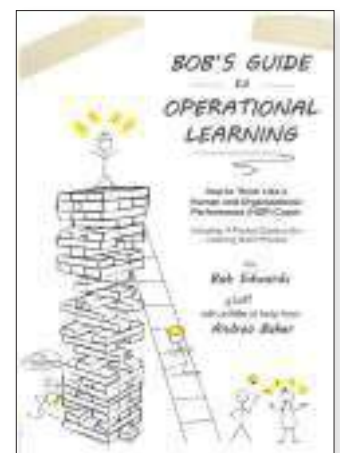
Fortunately, that is one trend that is changing a growing number of minds in our industry into doing something different. The reason: if we keep doing the same things over and over again expecting a different outcome, we are probably going to continue to drive ourselves insane when it comes to improving our industry’s SIF trends. Data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics shows trending improvement in non-fatality rates over time but shows no improvement when it comes to SIF rates for at least two decades. This is why industry thought leaders around safety are calling for change. Not only are they calling for a philosophical change in safety beliefs but a change in how we measure success when it comes to safety performance.

In a recent interview with thought leader Dr. Todd Conklin, he was asked what three recommendations for organizations to implement to change how they viewed safety to improve

unwanted outcomes. Conklin’s recommendations addressed the following:

1. How does your organization currently define *success* in safety? A traditional approach where BBS requires a reduction of failure and is measured by lagging indicators, something must change. Safety success is the presence of capacity, not the absence of failure. You cannot learn from zero (the traditional absence-of-failure goal of BBS). Conklin further explained, “Would you trade a broken arm for a fatality?” Of course. “Then you must give us room to break arms,” he continued. Asking why things *didn’t* happen is just as important as why things *did* happen.
2. Second, he challenged us to change the way we do investigations. We should shift away from trying to control repeatable events to using tools that give your organization the ability to learn.
3. Lastly, recognize your leadership’s response to unfortunate events, and take note of how they respond to it. If they respond with “What the hell happened here?” vs. “What can we learn about this event to make us better?” you know you might have a problem. Leaders’ responses matter!

You are probably wondering *What is HOP and how can it help us accomplish the tasks that Conklin has laid out for us to start this transformation process?* Bob Edwards defines HOP as a way of thinking or an operating **philosophy** that helps us improve the workplace in a collaborative way. Human and Organizational Performance



Bob's Guide to Operational Learning by Bob Edwards and Andrea Baker.





# BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF INCLUSIVITY

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is also about how humans and organizations interact with each other to accomplish work and build more error-tolerant systems. In a principled way, it also teaches us that expecting perfection from workers, processes, or procedures is unrealistic.

The purpose of HOP is to proactively prevent unwanted outcomes that are triggered by human error. It is important to note that errors are not limited to an operational environment alone; errors occur everywhere within an organization and in our lives, therefore, HOP **should not** be considered another safety initiative (i.e., another flavor-of-the-month initiative). It is about increasing positive, desirable outcomes by reducing the likelihood of an errors' occurrence/exposure, and lessen the severity of a consequence (i.e., risk management).

The transformational challenge of this philosophical change that Conklin and others have described may feel daunting—yet it can be achieved. Stemmed from HOP practitioners and several authors, I recommend the following HOP tools to help you: System Thinking, Learning Teams, Humble Inquiry, and Leadership Fundamentals.

Exploring these tools and how they work, my goal is not to teach you how to use these tools but attempt to change the way you think. Philosophically, from a HOP perspective, we have to change how we think before we change how we learn, in order to design things differently.

## SYSTEM THINKING

Figure 1 is a simple way to help us visualize what a safety management system (SMS) looks like. Please note that no two organizational systems look alike, as is common. With that said, every system is made up of interdependent elements. There is an ANSI standard that helps us build and maintain the value of system thinking: the ANSI Z10.0-2019. You should already be familiar with every element. Understand that you are managing your organizational culture in a system, whether you are conscious of it or not. It may be a completely reactive system, but there is a system being managed. Intuitively, we all know that it's much more effective to manage a system proactively than reactively. To do that, you must be able to identify the elements of your system and who their owners are before you can start the proactive management process of maintaining and improving your SMS.

From my perspective, SMSs, or system thinking in general, are the most important tool because they are foundational to the philosophy of HOP. For a simple example, picture how a football team would struggle to win if the coach fielded 11 quarterbacks on offense, regardless of their talent, as opposed to the other team's offense of fielded lineman, tight ends, wide receivers, a running back, and a signal caller. Obviously the second team should

have the advantage, not because of size or talent but because of the knowledge and skill they possess, specific to their assigned positions. With their knowledge and skill sets, each element of their offensive system can now become interdependent on each other to be successful as a team. Some members are better blockers, receivers, kickers, passers, runners, and so on. We liken these skills on a team to elements in a SMS.

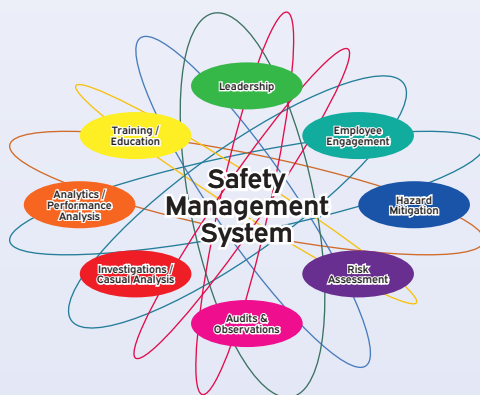
The better balanced, integrated, diversified team inherently builds the capacity, not to be perfect but to be able to adapt to errors (knowing they will occur) to fail safely. If the defense blitzes or changes their strategy, the offense adjusts or throws the ball away to play another down.

Effective systems often produce measurable results that *reduce* risk, injury, and illness, wasted resources, and organizational silos. On the other hand, they also tend to *improve* organizational learning, use of resources, employee engagement, and overall performance over time.

## LEARNING TEAMS

According to Bob Edwards, learning teams are all about conversations that bring people together that do the work, know the work, and understand how work gets done to solve an organizational problem. Rarely, if ever, does a learning team want to focus only on the details of an event. The learning team process is not meant to be an investigation that places blame, becomes punitive, or focuses on rules, processes, or procedures. Rather they are meant to be a conversation, or a story of *how*, that produces an open, honest discussion, with an outcome that is reliant on the expertise of your employees that solves a problem or seeks organizational/operational improvement. Additionally, there are six ingredients that are common with all successful learning teams:

1. **Psychological safety:** Assume that people show up to work to do good work and to not get hurt or break things. (They possess the Capacity for Candor.)
2. **Learn about normal work:** Consider the event as a symptom of a larger issue; don't fixate on the event. Ask questions about what a successful day/task looks like.
3. **How we ask questions:** Avoid asking closed-ended questions and those that put people on the offensive. The more time they spend defending themselves, the less time we get to learn about normal work.
4. **Soak Time:** Recall your last interview, confrontation, etc.—did you remember something important that you wish you had said after the fact? Soak Time leaves the meeting open long enough to capture any additional information that may surface after the initial learning team.
5. **Learn before doing:** There is an urge in most of us to try to fix things first. Fixing before learning often directs our fixing resources toward the wrong problem. Learning, soaking, defining problems, and then fixing them is the pathway to continuous improvement.
6. **Learning Product (output)** for others to learn from can be one or all of the following:
  - **The story:** A context-rich account of normal work and the unexpected coupling of conditions that lead to an event. This helps with collective learning.
  - **Team-owned ideas to improve:** Ideas the team came up with and those that are within their control
  - **Problem statements:** Areas for action or improvement

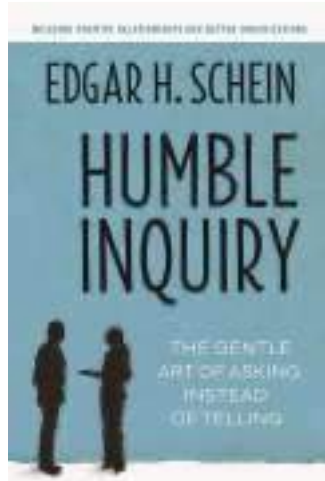


**Figure 1.** Safety Management System based on the ASSP GM-Z10.100-2019 Guidance and Implementation Manual for ANSI/ASSP Z10.0-2019 Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems



## HUMBLE INQUIRY

Edgar Schein wrote this wonderful, easy-to-read book on the art of asking, which in turn is really the art of learning. This tool, humble inquiry (HI), gives us the ability to build relationships that allow us to fix problems quicker and better. With that said, I tend to look at it in a much simpler way; I see it as a performance accelerator—and what we are trying to accelerate here is our ability to more effectively communicate with each other. Once you start to practice HI (at home, too) you will start to:



Humble Inquiry by Edgar H. Schein.

- Learn to see, hear, and curb your impulses to lash out
- Learn to make a habit of listening and figuring out what is going on before taking action
- Try harder to hear, understand, and acknowledge what others are trying to express before you try to solve the problem

Doesn't that sound like an awesome gift to give a newly hired supervisor, manager, or even safety professional within your organization? How often do these individuals, when they are hired into these new leadership roles, think that they must become the smartest person in the room once they are hired? Isn't it true that we, to a degree, hire these individuals to solve our problems and not to become another problem for us to fix? Think back to when you were newly hired into that type of role. Didn't you feel like the expectation was that you needed to be the smartest person in the room, solve problems, or at least keep problems from being elevated to superiors? I know I did. Maybe we can change that outcome by incorporating a little humble inquiry into our daily activities by giving this tool a try. In return, this effort will have the effect of helping new leaders learn how work gets done while helping organizations develop a culture of learning.

## LEADERSHIP FUNDAMENTALS

This is the last tool—but certainly not least. Todd Conklin's last suggestion for us is to remember that leadership's response matters. It is also one of the five HOP principles. With that said, it could also be considered a key indicator as to whether your philosophical shift away from BBS practices is occurring or not. If you want to measure this concept, have the courage to survey your team (anonymously), then discuss the results with peers or a trusted sounding board about what you can or should do differently. If you have the mindset of a continuous improvement model (plan, do, check, and adjust), you can't underestimate the value of this type of feedback. With that said, I have found in leadership circles that there are typically seven fundamental principles that help organizations align leadership for success.

1. **Listen:** May be the most vital skill that any leader possesses. When it comes to employee safety and concerns, it is imperative to listen and not just hear.

2. **Get Out and Look:** If listening is step one to understanding a concern, seeing it firsthand is the next step. The paperwork sitting on your desk can often wait. If you are a team lead, it is difficult to learn things about your team if the only interaction you have with them is on the phone.
3. **Be Humble:** Be humble and give credit where credit is due. The goal is to develop and maintain a successful system without promoting or touting one element's success over another's. In Top Gun school, the best fighter pilots, instructors, and leaders in the squadron have three identifiable traits: Humble, Approachable, and Credible. If these attributes can help the best of our best be better, then there is something we all can learn from these amazing professionals.
4. **Do what you say you will do, and model the behavior you expect:** Your commitment to safety is not going to be measured by what you say but by what you do. So be mindful that when you instruct an employee to deliver paperwork to your house on the weekend. If they see you mowing your lawn in your shorts and flip flops, think about how impactful that moment will be the next time you are talking to them about safety on the job.
5. **Empathize:** It can be tough to communicate a concern, especially if there is a perceived negative consequence. Most people have ambition and want to do well. Take the time to understand their concerns even if you think it is not a big deal; the next time they think about bringing a concern to you, it might be a big deal. However, you may not hear about it if you don't have empathy. By showing empathy towards others' concerns, you can improve the flow and regularity of information within your organization.
6. **Communicate:** A lack of communication can erode the trust your team has in you to keep them out of harm's way. Trust is gained a thimble at a time and will be gradually lost if you cannot communicate effectively.
7. **Give timely feedback:** Even the best of us need feedback, because all humans are fallible. Even if you disagree with 90% of what is being said, try not to take feedback personally. Otherwise, the 10% that you could have used as a golden nugget of information that might help you and others may be lost.

Fortunately, there is a positive trend that is changing a growing number of minds in our industry to thinking about safety differently. While the tools described above do not represent an all-inclusive list that helps define system success, it is important to remember what your organizational goal should be *resilience*. We all know, consciously or subconsciously, that our organizations are not perfect and we all are going to make mistakes that lead to events and near events—some of which might be potentially devastating—in the future. However, through HOP, organizational resilience is not just the concept of recovery anymore. It also includes the organization's ability to detect potential failures and opportunities before they occur. Our individual and collective challenge is to manage this needed change to a different philosophical approach of doing safety differently. This is something we all can start tomorrow with your first interaction with your teams and build a continuous improvement model within your SMS from there. To continue this discussion or explore your new potential in managing safety systems, feel free to reach out to me at [paul.hurysz@davey.com](mailto:paul.hurysz@davey.com) or (704) 589-2995. ☎

From the USDA Forest Service and partners

# Forest Management in Cities: Creating Climate-Resilient Oak Forests

By Richard Hallett, USFS Research Ecologist; Max R. Piana, USFS Research Ecologist; and Phil Rodbell, USFS National Program Leader for Urban Forestry Research

Photos courtesy of Richard Hallett. This article was republished from *City Trees* magazine with permission from the U.S. Forest Service and the Urban and Community Forestry Society ([ucfsociety.org](http://ucfsociety.org)).

Oaks (*Quercus* spp.) are one of the most important trees in the Eastern United States—for the ecosystem, for the economy, and for beauty and pure enjoyment. Though they are sturdy, their future needs our care, and we can start in cities.

Oak forests comprise over half of all forest land in the Eastern U.S. (Smith et al. 2009; Oswalt et al. 2014). Oaks are keystone species that support biodiversity by providing food for many insects, birds, and mammals (Tallamy and Shropshire 2009). White oak (*Quercus alba*) wood is used in furniture, cabinetry, flooring, and barrel making. In Kentucky, for instance, white oak is an \$8 billion industry, mostly generated by the distilling industry.

The challenge for oak species throughout the entire Eastern U.S. is that they are not regenerating (Dey 2014). This is happening in cities, too, where barriers to oak regeneration are exacerbated by greater abundance of invasive plants, increased herbivory, and acorn predation (Piana et al. 2019; 2021).

Within many cities, forests—distinct from street trees or yard trees—are common, abundant, and vital ecosystems providing important refuge and habitat

to diverse biota (Figure 1) (Trammell et al. 2020; Spotswood et al. 2021). While oaks are prevalent in many forested urban natural areas, they are mostly mature. There are no oak seedlings ready to replace them as they die off due to insect and disease pressure, windstorms, and simply from old age. Successful regeneration of oaks requires planning and intentional management, in cities and throughout their native range.

Urban forest managers have a wealth of knowledge based on decades of managing forests in their cities. They have learned which species do well in each location. They watch and learn as their forests grow and change. However, they are currently facing the unknown. They see that the sustainability of forests in cities is threatened by climate change and other stressors like invasive species, fragmentation, and pollution (Fowler et al. 2021; Piana et al. 2021).

This is where research can play an important role, conducting applied studies that explore novel approaches at small scales—e.g., new planting techniques, different species mixes, and new genotypes. These small-scale plantings can aid in developing new management strategies that can



Figure 1. Inwood Hill Park, at the northern tip of Manhattan, New York City.

help increase the overall sustainability and resilience of forests in cities. This includes the opportunity to advance understanding of how oak systems will respond to continued global change—and to test new adaptive management strategies relevant to urban managers and oak conservation more broadly. An example of our current work follows.

## CLIMATE-ADAPTED OAK RESTORATION STUDY IN CITIES

In 2020, the USDA Forest Service and partners convened a network of 15 scientists and 23 urban forest managers (conservation practitioners) in a workshop focused on urban and climate vulnerability, adaptation, and management strategies for forests in cities across the northeastern United States (Piana et al. 2021). The Northeast Urban Silviculture Network created a study design, partially funded by a Forest Service grant awarded to Dr. Tara Trammell at the University of Delaware.

During the fall of 2022 we collected 100,000 acorns from six seed zones

## CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND ASSISTED MIGRATION

Forests are not static; trees disperse, and the range of each species expands, shrinks, or migrates over time. In forests of the Eastern U.S., the range of a species may only move 10 miles (16 km) per decade on its own (Fei et al. 2017). As climate changes, many species may be challenged to keep up with warming temperatures. As a result, trees in a given location today may be maladapted to the climate of tomorrow.

One possible management strategy to combat these climate change impacts is assisted forest migration, which may involve moving (a) genes or provenances of a species within a range (i.e. assisted population migration), (b) expanding migration just outside of the natural range (assisted range expansion), or (c) moving species to an entirely different location (assisted species migration). Due to the Urban Heat Island effect, cities are already 5–7 degrees warmer than nearby non-urban landscapes (Figure 2). Consequently, cities provide a dynamic testbed for assisted migration studies and findings that may have relevance to future rural forest populations.





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**Figure 2.** The cities (green stars) hosting the Climate Adapted Oak Restoration Study are areas with under-represented, under-resourced, and potentially vulnerable populations, as shown by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (left panel), which maps “disadvantaged communities.” Urban areas are experiencing higher temperatures than less populated areas (right panel), due to the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect, an additional stressor on trees and forests, and on people.

spanning a climate gradient stretching from Tennessee to Massachusetts. The acorns were planted at a nursery in Kentucky and lifted in February 2023. From March to May 2023, we planted 9,000 bare-root oak seedlings in each of four cities. The cities of Baltimore, Maryland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New Haven, Connecticut; and Springfield, Massachusetts, each received trees that have parents from every seed zone (Figure 2).

One of the central questions around regenerating oak is how much light is needed for the seedlings to reach sapling stage and subsequently become part of the overstory (Rebbeck et al. 2011). In rural forest management, thinning forested stands to increase the amount of light that reaches the forest floor is a common practice that can enhance oak regeneration. For urban forest

managers, cutting mature trees is often illegal, and usually frowned upon by the public. Consequently, in our study we capitalized on existing, natural gaps in forest canopy. Gaps are created by the loss of large, canopy-dominant trees due to windstorms, insects and disease, or old age (Figure 3).

In urban forested natural areas these gaps are areas of concern due to the lack of native tree regeneration coupled with invasive vegetation that responds rapidly to the increased light (Figure 4).

In addition to questions about light availability, our research will strive to answer other key questions about oak establishment such as:

- Will trees from parents growing in warmer climates be better adapted to warmer environments in cities or in the future? (Many oak species can live for several hundred years.)



**Figure 4.** An example of an invaded canopy gap in Pelham Bay Park, Bronx, New York. Invasive plant species respond to additional light, preventing native tree regeneration from occurring.

- How can we help our forest management partners scale this work so they can use what we learn to make their urban forested natural areas more resilient?
- Can what we learn in urban oak forest restoration be used to help make rural oak forests sustainable in a changing climate?

This applied research project has the potential to inform both urban and rural forest managers as they strive to create climate resilient oak forests. In rural forests, this means a continued supply of oak wood products that is critical to local economies. In urban areas, these techniques, we hope, will serve to sustain urban forested natural areas for future generations to enjoy.



**Figure 3.** Max Piana surveying an existing canopy gap in New Haven, Connecticut.



## MANAGING FOR OAK IN THE CITY: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Increase or utilize the light that reaches the forest floor to create conditions that support the establishment of oak seedlings and saplings.
- Maintain deer-exclusion fencing until trees are well established.
- Encourage natural regeneration by managing invasive plants.

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## OPINION EDITORIAL

# Giving a New Meaning to a Lifelong Career

By Kelly Zajicek, Operations Manager, ACRT

Photos courtesy of Kelly Zajicek.

**M**y life has been intertwined with this industry since the womb. My mother worked at a Texas investor-owned utility for 41 years. It's nostalgic to think about the organization that supported my mother when she welcomed me and my twin brother into the world. It even makes up my earliest memories. Now, as an industry veteran, I enjoy the "full-circle" moments, like recalling visits to the transmission offices and "war room" as a teenager.

My mother began her career in the industry as a junior accountant and was in a financial support role when she retired. She ended up in a support role because, having been there for so long, she was a fountain of information and knew how things were done. It's important that you hold on to those seasoned people rather than look for the newest and greatest thing. As you get long in the tooth at a company, there will be flashy new people who come in, but you can't forget about the people who helped get the company where it is today.

As a kid, I didn't go to school for vegetation management. I received my business degree from the University of Texas at Arlington. Over time, my brother-in-law kept planting seeds and encouraging me to apply at the company he worked for: ACRT. For nearly a year and a half, he had said, "Kelly, you have to come work here. It's awesome." But I



Pam and Kelly Zajicek.

was happy at my current job working as a warehouse manager for an LED and fiber-optic company in Dallas. After a couple of years, he asked me again and I finally agreed to apply.

I started out on the ground level as a notifier. After realizing I'd be working alongside the same Texas IOU that afforded us a good lifestyle growing up, my mother beamed with excitement. Who knew that you could get paid to knock on people's doors and talk to them about utility lines and tree trimming? I had no idea that was even a *paying* job. In college, I had figured that I would be hired by a good company, start at the bottom, work my way up, and hopefully succeed.

At that point, the decision to make a career change felt easy and reassuring.

Over the years, I've worked on different projects and developed relationships with folks whom I've been proud to introduce myself as Pam Zajicek's son. Though we never had the opportunity to work alongside each other, we communicated with many of the same individuals, especially when operating in storm mode.

Beginning with a business degree, I never would have imagined ending up where I am today: being a contractor for the company that my mother retired from. It's very cool.

While others may not have a connection to this industry from birth, you become family once you join. This industry is special in many ways, and one I hope to retire from after many years—just like my mother.



Pam Zajicek, at her work baby shower before welcoming twins.





## Get your original photo published on the cover of the *Utility Arborist Newsline*!

We are encouraging members to submit their best photos representing professional utility arboricultural services, centered around the people who make up our incredible industry.

The selected photos, chosen by the UAA Editorial Committee, will be featured as the cover art for the 2024 *UAN* issues. Our goal is to showcase the diversity of the people and roles in the industry, whose commitment and dedication enrich the growth and practices of utility arboriculture.

These photos should be:

- Full page, measuring 7.5" x 9.875"
- Portrait mode, not landscape
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Submit all photos to [newsline@gotouaa.org](mailto:newsline@gotouaa.org).

The image deadlines for the remaining magazine issue are as follows:

MAR/APR—February 1, 2024  
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We look forward to seeing your photos!



## Fireside Chat



Dennis Fallon, UAA



Caitlyn Pollihan, ISA



Nadia Geagea Pupa  
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Learn more about the arboriculture and utility vegetation management (UVM) industries as Executive Directors, Caitlyn Pollihan (ISA) and Dennis Fallon (UAA), come together for a fireside chat to share information, insights, and perspectives. These industry leaders are critical to shaping how each organization reaches its members (individually and jointly) to provide educational resources and guidance for strengthening its community—from the boots on the ground to corporate CEOs. Both leaders share how their organizations are investing in new technologies, addressing ESG (environmental, social, governance) initiatives, redefining our safety culture, and bringing awareness to career opportunities for students in the ever-growing UVM and tree care fields.

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