



*How a leader operates*

# The Davey Tree Expert Company

*"The original and largest complete tree service organization . . ."*

**W**HILE the claim to being largest, depending on definition, may be disputed, the descriptive phase is reason enough to write about The Davey Tree Expert Company.

Founded in 1909 in Kent, Ohio, it operates in 42 states and Canada with nearly 2000 employees, and is expecting sales this year of \$19 million.

The name means what it says, The Davey Tree Expert Company, whether the *expert* refers to "tree" (and know-how about other services performed) or to "company" as an opinion of how the business is organized and operated.

Davey's varied operations can be grouped into three categories: utility services represent 60% of the volume; tree care 35%; and landscaping and miscellaneous services the remainder. Many projects include work in more than one category.

Davey men move easily and comfortably in the highest echelons of industry and government. Yet the Davey reputation rests finally with the men who wrestle the rugged brush country, swing skillfully in the trees, and tread delicately over commercial and private lawns. That has been the story since 1909.

Eight years earlier, according to Davey President Alexander M. Smith, founder John Davey published a book, *The Tree Doctor*.

"He wanted to interest people in preserving trees," Smith said, "for from the time pioneers settled the country, they had toiled to cut down trees. In some respects, the pioneers considered a tree a nuisance as they worked to clear the land to farm."

As early as 1880, founder Davey had spoken of his then revolutionary idea of preserving trees by scientific care. From the time he had arrived

in America in 1873 from his native England, Davey had been appalled by the neglect and abuse of trees, and by the seeming indifference toward their ailments.

He wrote his book on the principle that trees are living things, and, with proper care, the life of a tree could be prolonged at least for a span that far exceeded human life.

"The first reaction he got from the book," said Smith, "came from people who couldn't see themselves climbing around in trees. So they ask John Davey to take care of their trees for them.

"And that's about how the company got started."

An early question that comes to mind is: How can a company of this nature achieve uniformity in the quality of products and services? Operations are far-flung, and hundreds of men work pretty much individually and independently of each other as they collectively build the corporate reputation.

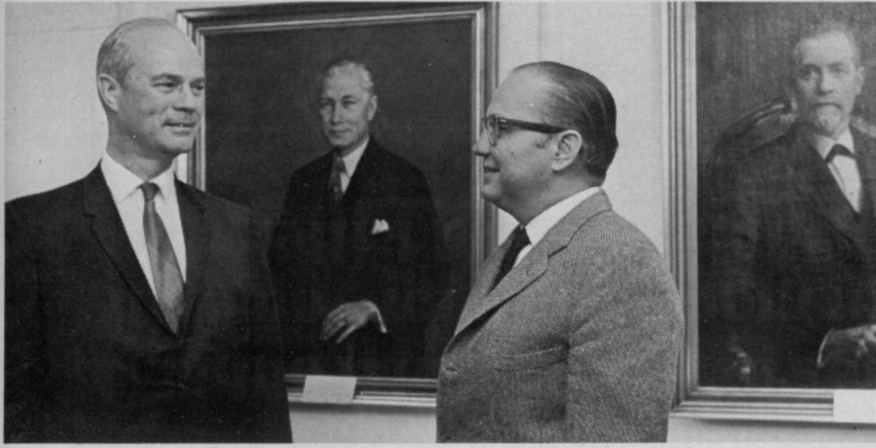
The answer comes in a number of parts. Among them:

- a required training course for personnel working in the field;
- written procedure guides for the variety of services performed;
- standard billing rates;
- continuing quality control research on all products used; and
- a supporting administrative staff well-versed in field operations.

"Practically, every man working in the field has gone through our school, or else works directly under a man who has," said J. W. Joy, vice-president in charge of sales.

## First Training Center

Joy was speaking of the Davey Institute of Tree Service in Kent, the first school of its kind. Company photographer Dick Birkenner's albums are filled with hundreds of photos of graduates since the institute was begun in 1909.



Davey leadership is shown at left, at the beginning and present. In the foreground are Alexander M. Smith, left, president, and Martin L. Davey, Jr., chairman of the board. Portraits in the background are those of founder John Davey, right, and successor, his son, Martin Davey, Sr., who served in a number of federal and state legislative posts, including governor of Ohio from 1935-39.

There is ample evidence of the Davey spirit in those early days among students beyond learning the fine points of their chosen trade. Albums contain picture after picture of athletic teams — basketball, boxing, baseball, fencing, wrestling. Extra-curricular in some respects, this type of program had its merits. It helped develop able-bodied men, the kind Davey Company is having increasing difficulty finding today.

"We're feeling the effects of the war in Vietnam and the related manpower shortages as are many companies," said Bert Stamp, vice-president for field operations.

Times change, and emphasis is less on athletic competition, but learning the Davey trade is as intensive.

New men, whether they lack a high school diploma or hold a col-

lege degree, start with the apprentice school. They learn *exactly* how a Davey man ties knots and uses a rope; climbs a tree; prunes a limb; repairs a cavity; cares for tools; identifies leaves, twigs and insects; directs a spray stream; feeds brush into a chipper; maneuvers a back hoe or an aerial bucket.

Some men continue their training through a 10-lesson extension course that qualifies them to attend foremanship school.

For the most part, the institute subject matter is technical. Foremen do get sessions on salesmanship, complaint handling, administrative reporting, and employment practices.

Joy readily concedes that Davey foremen, district managers and area representatives are technicians first and salesmen second.

"When businessmen or homeowners call a Davey man, they don't expect a salesman, they expect a consulting arborist," he said.

#### 42 'Profit Centers'

Davey's field organization is similar to that of most large companies. Larger territories usually have a supervisor and district manager, a general foreman, and any number of foremen in charge of the crews. Smaller territories may not have a general foreman and the supervisor and the district manager may be the same person.

The top man in each of the sales territories works solely on commission, "so you might say we have 42 profit centers," said Joy.

"We establish policies and work procedures in detail," Joy explained.



"We planted a forest (1700 trees) in Arlington National Cemetery in 1968," reported Ted Baer, assistant sales manager, in giving an example of Davey customers. Landscaping jobs have included the Deere & Company Administrative Center in Moline, Ill., and the grounds of four state



capitals. More than 30,000 diseased elms have been removed for the City of Buffalo, N.Y. And the new "Bombardier," a tracked vehicle, masters the rugged terrain of rights-of-way spraying jobs for big utilities, such as Duke Power, Consumers Power and New England Power.





Davey crews vary in size according to requirements. The crew above displays its standard equipment.

"Procedure manuals are furnished to every foreman, some 600 of them.

"Standard billing rates cover everything we do. We review them once a year, consulting with the district manager. All billing is handled from the main office."

While men in the field handle most bidding, larger "house jobs" are bid by the home office. Examples are a recent project in Arlington National Cemetery, line-clearing for large utility companies, and certain specialized operations.

"We still contract some new business on the basis of bid," Joy said, "but as customers get to know Davey work, we change to time and material. I would say that 70% of our resale work is on this basis."

#### Advertising Coordinated

A full battery of promotional material flows regularly from the home office at 117 S. Water St., announced

inconspicuously by a simple 18 x 4-inch metal plate on the door.

"We maintain an 80,000-name list of home-owners and contact them by direct mail to solicit their continued tree-care business," said Advertising Manager Henry Schmid.

Yellow-page advertising goes in about 200 books. "We've found that about half of the people have a name in mind when they look for a service, so we feel that being there is most important," Schmid explained.

Hopefully the listing will be connected with Davey's national advertising program.

Though the "front door" is almost hard to find, there is ample living evidence of the Davey Tree Expert Company around Kent — known as the Tree City.

Sizable portions of Kent's residential area look like those of any other city, except for one thing —

many of the trees are growing in neatly arranged rows.

"I helped plant one of those," said Schmid, as we drove through one area. "I used to work in the field, and part of the school training is to learn how to plant trees.

"Most of our supervisory people in the home office actually did tree work to begin with. They came up from the field. In the operations end of the business, it's helpful to know how the field work is done."

When the Davey company takes great pains to develop a specialty, whether it's manpower, resources, or equipment, it also goes to extra effort to maintain that specialty.

#### Employee Benefits Varied

To keep its skilled manpower, for example, the company offers a complete benefits program, to include insurance, retirement, and savings plans. It maintains a 35-acre park with fishing and picnic grounds for employees in Kent and provides a scholarship program at Kent State University for employees' children.

The Davey Bulletin, monthly employee magazine, is in its 58th year. Editor George Galloway counts among his contributors "All Davey Folks."

Concerning resources, Davey has a research farm and nursery stock near Kent and a 40,000-tree nursery at Wooster, Ohio.

#### Vast Equipment Array

Davey's biggest expression of intent to preserve an asset is a new \$250,000 Kent service center, completed last fall. The 28,000 sq. ft.

Major servicing and customizing of \$3 million worth of Davey equipment is done in a 28,000 sq. ft. shop in Kent, completed last fall. Al Stress, right, directs the efforts of 22 men. The shop is equipped to handle everything from sharpening hand saws to overhauling trucks and cranes.





In an "indoor forest," students at the Davey Institute of Tree Service, the first training center of its kind, are learning how to repair a tree cavity.

shop-warehouse is on a 10-acre site that may one day include a new headquarters building.

Twenty-two men work year-around, under the direction of shop foreman Al Stress, to do the major servicing of its massive array of equipment.

At last count, it stood at: more than 700 trucks (half-ton to three-ton); more than 300 brush-grinding chippers; 244 shade tree sprayers (truck mounted); 58 tractors; 815 power chain saws; some 5000 hand saws and pole pruners; and 275 electric drills. In addition, some of the 600 foremen have their own trucks. Davey crews are supplied with at least 160 varieties and sizes of tools.

Essentially, the Kent shop-warehouse customizes new equipment, to include Davey identification; does major equipment overhaul; and builds special equipment.

The shop features seven truck-repair bays, welding shop, chain saw shop, paint shop, sandblast room, spray pump area, carpenter shop, and two crane repair bays. The building's 11 doors include two 14-footers to handle truck-mounted cranes and aerial bucket units.

"We keep a repair record of everything that goes through here," said Al Stress. "That way we can tell when one unit is costing us \$5.50 an hour while another is running for half that."

Davey has four other smaller maintenance shops, but regular servicing is usually done in the area where the vehicles operate.

#### Materials Evaluated

Evaluation research goes on constantly under the direction of Bill Jeffers, vice-president of research and development. Jeffers' specialty

is weed and brush control; his technical adviser, Henry Gilbertson, has a master's degree in plant pathology.

"We try to insure that the products we purchase are up to standard and will do what the manufacturers say they will do," said Gilbertson.

"We evaluate new materials from chemical companies before they're on the market to see how they might work into our control program. Tests are under way now on slow-release fertilizers for trees."

"We receive samples (300 a year) from all over the country from our field men of their insect troubles or disease problems. We'll run a culture and then recommend, if possible, how the problem can be controlled."

Continuing quality-control research goes on concerning the products manufactured for Davey and that are sold under the Davey label. These include Davey Tree Food, Arbor-Green (an organic tree food), and Davey-Green Lawn Food.

A study is going on now of an infra-red instrument that is supposed to have the capability of detecting faults or a "hot-spot" along utility lines. It also detects pollution in lakes and rivers. This kind of work is an example of the on-going search, President Smith spoke of, that the Davey company will do to broaden the services that the company provides. As another example, he said Davey is doing some cable-burying work for utilities.

Smith is optimistic about the future, citing a "growing awareness on the part of the general public and utility companies" for preserving and beautifying the plant environment around them.



Employees have a wide range of experience, having worked in a number of jobs over the years. F. H. "Whitey" Myers, left, an employee since 1926 and who sharpens hand saws at the rate of 1500 a year, has helped train dozens of Davey students. At right, 12-year employee Henry



Schmid strolls through a residential area near Kent enhanced with trees planted by Davey men as part of their training. Schmid once worked in the field, went through the school, and helped plant one of the trees in this grove.