

Norman V. Holmes, Inc.

Firm Specializes In Tree Care Only

By PHIL LANCE
Philadelphia, Pa.

THIS IS THE AGE of specialization and customers like to do business with specialists.

When it comes to tree work, there are several forms of specialization and one of them is tree maintenance. In suburban Philadelphia, Norman V. Holmes, Inc., Lafayette Hill, is one of the oldest firms in the Delaware Valley that specializes in tree maintenance.

Since 1920, Norman Holmes has been a landscaping contractor and tree surgeon. Through his specialization in maintenance tree work, he developed a reputation that minimized his need for solicitation and advertising to build his business.

In 1946, he was joined by his son, Frank, who practically grew up in the tree maintenance field. After his stint in the service, Frank came into the firm on a full-time basis.

In 1962, Frank became the President of Norman V. Holmes, Inc. Through his astute management and aggressiveness, he developed it into one of the leading tree maintenance organizations that serves a five-state area.

Universities Among Accounts

"Our main activities are concentrated within a 50-mile radius," explains Holmes. "However, our reputation for the type of tree maintenance work that we do has spread about so that we get calls from as far south as Washington, D. C.

"In the main, institutional and industrial accounts make up our largest volume of work. We do not overlook any account regardless of its size. We service from one to several hundred trees for a single account. The old bromide—no job is too large

Whether the job is a homeowner's one big tree or a university's campus full of trees, Norman V. Holmes, Inc., offers the same per-tree charge. When there is a single service, a minimum fee is charged.

or too small for us—has been the basis for our consistent growth.

“Numbered among our accounts are practically all of the leading universities in the area, such as Villanova, St. Josephs, Mercy College, and Georgetown University in Washington.

“When purchasing agents, maintenance foremen or greenskeepers relocate, they remember our services and call upon us. By the same token, they discuss our services at various association meetings and at group activities. What better way is there to be more generally publicized than through the recommendations of a satisfied user?”

Specialization Is the Emphasis

The Holmes Company does only maintenance work. It doesn't install, remove or relocate trees. This work is sub-contracted to others who specialize in this type of activity.

“Specialization is the backbone of our business, and we do not want to dilute it with any other type of activity,” continues Holmes. “True, it is sometimes hard to turn down a profitable job, but we have to do it in order to maintain the image that we have developed. In itself, tree maintenance work is a specialty activity. This is where our field of endeavor lies. We have the experience, manpower, equipment and know-how which has enabled us to give expert services at the most reasonable prices. We have always charged the same price for the same type of service in the same area whether it is for one tree or a few hundred.

Stabilized Prices Pay Off

“Past experience has shown us that area residents are in contact, one with another, when it comes to tree maintenance, and the only way to maintain a healthy relationship is to stabilize prices. Let me cite an example.

“We maintained three trees on a nearby homesite. We maintain close to (100) on institutional grounds just a short distance away. The homeowner knows the maintenance man at the institution, and they have discussed tree maintenance between them. Naturally, the subject of cost has arisen, and our per-tree charges have been the same. Needless to say, we have maintained the goodwill of both customers and, through them, have been recommended to others.”

Holmes does point out that he has a \$15 or \$20 minimum where a single service is needed. This is not what he usually charges for his other services. They vary according

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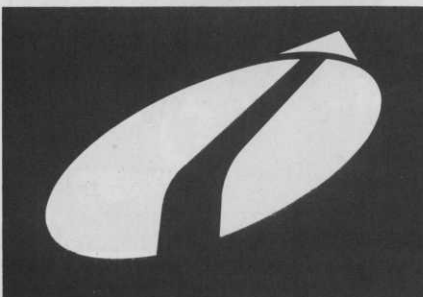
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to need and other factors. However, the minimum prevails where a single service is required.

Program Matches Budget

Whenever possible, the firm features the importance of a tree maintenance program. This may be carried over a three-or-four-year period, depending upon the amount allotted to the tree maintenance program. Many institutions and industries allot a pre-determined sum to cover their grounds program. The Holmes Company tries to fit in the overall maintenance program within this specified allotment.

"When an institution cannot allot all the money that is needed to maintain its annual tree maintenance program, we program it over a three- or four-year program, at which time everything should be in proper order," says Holmes. "We do quite a bit of this with universities.

"The first year, we concentrate on the most important section where tree maintenance work is needed. During the second year, we take the second section and look after the first. During the third year, we cover the third section and check back on the first and second again. During the fourth year, we do the final section and check back on the first three.

"Thereafter, tree maintenance work is handled on a complete annual basis. The amount allotted for one year now covers the entire area. We have found this program to be an attractive one to industries, etc., who can only allot specified amounts for tree maintenance work."



Though the tree care company emphasizes maintenance, new product areas are explored. Frank Holmes is examining Monsanto's Astro Turf, being offered to selected customers.

File System Says When

The firm services more than 600 accounts. Once entrusted to Norman V. Holmes, Inc., the account can depend upon reliable and continuous service.

A two-color card file insures timely service and maintenance as it is required. All pruning and feeding accounts are contained on file cards in one color and those coming under the sprays program on cards of another color.

Starting in March with a dormant spray, fungicide and feeding, these activities are carried out until the fall season. Route sheets are prepared daily for the crews handling maintenance work. These vary from seven crews to twelve crews, depending upon the period of the year. There are about three in each crew.

A fleet of 23 vehicles and trucks, including five spray rigs, chippers, a winch truck and another equipped with a utility boom serves the firm's accounts.

Holmes is a great believer in having all the necessary equipment and using the highest quality supplies and products. According to him, "the results remain long after the price has been paid." This means better results, greater economy and better relationships all around.

"You only get what you pay for today and by paying a little more, you get substantially more in return," explains Holmes. "Initially, price may be of some concern, but when long lasting results are observed, it shows that the price was more reasonable in the long run.

"We use our results as testimonials to our customers. We point out areas and trees that are under our maintenance service and let the prospects see what our workmanship is like for themselves, and they can also speak to the owners. When you can make presentations such as these, price becomes a secondary factor."

Turf Subsidiary Formed

In an effort to provide a one-stop service for turf needs, the firm has recently become a distributor for Monsanto Astro Turf. Its first association with this artificial turf was the University of Pennsylvania's Franklin Field. This was the first and largest area covered with this material, and it has been a testimonial for this firm.

Holmes has set up a subsidiary; Turf Services, Inc., to handle this product line. The purpose is to keep both activities independent so that the specialization image can be developed for both.