

Association Profile

An Interview With Robert Felix, Executive Secretary, National Arborist Association

WTT. Bob, in the May issue of **WEEDS TREES AND TURF** you indicated in the Guest Editorial column that the tree care market is in some instances dwindling. What is the future of the industry?

A. As long as we have urban forests owned by private homeowners, institutions, commercial properties and government we will have practicing, successful commercial arborists. As a result of the monumental concern about our environment, everyone has become interested in the preservation of our trees. As economic conditions permit our markets will grow.

WTT. What effect have Federal Regulatory bodies, such as OSHA and EPA, had on the commercial arborist?

A. Both OSHA and EPA have made tree men more conscious of safe practices. Compliance has been and will continue to be, expensive. Those regulations which are impractical will be hard to live with and through the efforts of the National Arborist Association and others in the "Green Industries" will either be rescinded or made more palatable. However, this will not happen overnight by waving a magic wand. Each issue will have to be dealt with individually as was the case with OSHA and the nylon ballistic leggings for chain saw operators. Our best bet is to be aware of new regulations and if they are detrimental to

the industry make them compatible before the fact and not after. The National Arborist Association is helping to do this with increasing frequency. Our comments on proposed regulations are receiving proper consideration, have been published in the Federal Register and have even been solicited.

Many tree men complain about being regulated unfairly and rightly so, but when we ask for support in the way of letters to congressmen, agencies, governors or anything else they absolutely bury their heads. Like it or not, regulations, certification and safety requirements have done a great deal to up-grade our industry.

WTT. What about State Licensing laws for arborists?

A. Since there is little consistency in the licensing laws from State to State it is difficult to make an all encompassing observation.

In many cases a State license or certification is only a prestige item because licensing is not mandatory or no one enforces the regulation. In other cases licenses are available to people with good technical knowledge and no practical experience. As a result you could find yourself with a licensed arborist who has never climbed a tree.

Although intended to up-grade the industry, many licensed arborists consider certification or licensing as a means of dealing with competition. If State licensing laws

could achieve some degree of uniformity, be awarded to those who have demonstrated a technical as well as practical knowledge and could be policed they would have much more impact.

WTT. Is the typical commercial arborist a better business man today than he was 25 years ago?

A. Very definitely. The pendulum has swung the other way. In most cases today's commercial arborist is not only a technically proficient tree expert but a sophisticated businessman, utilizing all of the modern business techniques available to him. This is as true of the small operation as well as the large. Electronic data processing is now being used by a number of commercial arborists to perform accounting functions. Electronic typewriters hammer out direct mail solicitations, automatically typed for each customer, two way radios expedite service and everybody is cost conscious.

WTT. What is the role of the National Arborist Association in the tree care industry today?

A. The purpose of the National Arborist Association is to bring together firms engaged in the field of commercial arboriculture to share valuable information; to encourage sound and useful legislation and regulations, to maintain good ethics and standards of practice in the profession and to foster a spirit of harmony and cooperation among members and throughout the industry. We accomplish much of this through our annual meeting, our monthly newsletter and other publications as well as the many member services that we provide such as our Home Study Program. In addition I

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Robert Felix

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right-of-way maintenance, street trimming, or street pickup. The folding feed chute design has gained in popularity because it can be folded in half, creating an effective barrier against vandalism and urban trash accumulation in the feed area of a parked chipper. The folding feed chute, when closed, reduces the overall towing length of the chipper by about 30 inches, allowing for more maneuverability in tight areas.

Feed chute bottom, top and sides are required by OSHA to be designed to prevent operator contact with the cutting cylinder, knives, or blower blades under normal operating conditions. It is the equipment owner's responsibility to insure that his equipment is in good condition and compliance with these standards. It is the operator's responsibility to use the machine in accordance with national, state, and local safety standards, as well as the manufacturer's recommended operating methods.

Once the wood is past the feed chute, and through the cutting cylinder, it is exhausted by means of a discharge chute, which is available in two designs — straight or round. The straight discharge chute will place chips in one direction — straight ahead, but usually incorporates a deflector, or bonnet, at its far end to direct the chip flow up or down. Some straight chutes are available with an attachment for directing chip flow to the right or left as well.

Round discharge chutes are designed to allow the chip direction to be quickly and easily changed from straight ahead to any position within 360°. They also include an adjustable bonnet and the added feature of being adjustable for height, to allow for varying chip box heights when one chipper is used with several trucks.

All chippers' discharge chutes will plug up with material at one time or another, for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons are incorrect engine RPM (running too slow), worn throttle controls, improper engine governor and linkage maintenance, incorrect angle used when knives are sharpened, dull knives or worn cutting bar. Nevertheless, a plugged chute is an inconvenience, and most chipper manufacturers have made provisions for cleaning out their dis-

charge chutes. Some chutes have hinges in the middle and can be folded back for cleanout. Others have an access door in the side which is simply opened to remove whatever has caused a problem. Access doors can also be used to inspect knife condition without having to use wrenches or other tools. In the interest of safety, it is strongly recommended that no maintenance work be performed on any chipper until the engine is shut off, key removed, and the cutting cylinder has come to a complete stop.

In the final analysis, it should be pointed out that all brush chippers will chip wood. It is, however, to the buyer's advantage that he be aware of the chipper which is best suited for his needs. There are high-production and low-production chippers; long-life and short-life chippers; and, of course, expensive chippers and less expensive chippers. Of the wide selection of brush chippers on the market today, the potential buyer can be assured of finding several makes which will prove to be inexpensive, low maintenance, long-life and high-production machines.

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travel around the United States attending meetings, visiting member companies and collecting ideas for redistribution to the rest of the membership. I also stay on top of the Washington scene and represent our membership there.

Therefore our role is to see to it that our members are the most well informed, up-to-date individuals in the tree care industry. As a group we have impact. The more numbers we have the more weight we will carry. We want to up-grade our profession as an industry and we can better do this as a group than we can individually.

There are many facets to today's successful commercial arborist. It is our intent to provide as much input to each facet of that commercial arborist as we can!

WTT. What do you feel would be the single most important step that the industry could take at this time?

A. Sadly enough, as technically proficient as we are and as astute as we are becoming as businessmen, there is one ingredient that is lacking; a professional image. We are as

unprofessional a group of pseudo professionals as one would find anywhere. In the last sixteen months I have traveled close to 50,000 miles visiting tree companies in all parts of the country from Maine to Florida and West to California. I have seen good tree work coupled with poor business practices and good business practices coupled with poor tree work. I have seen abominable customer relations and amateur equipment. If I was an OSHA compliance officer I would have writers cramp. Our professional image either doesn't exist or has been so maligned by unprofessional practices that it is beyond recognition.

With only a few exceptions, I have yet to see a commercial tree care company that has really put it all together. Considering the volume of information that management receives from trade association affiliations, trade publications and other sources it really is shocking to witness some of the things that I have seen.

It is imperative, if we have any hope of creating and maintaining a professional image, that we upgrade our standards and meet those standards with suitable management and production practices. Good practices mean more sales and more profit. Professionalism is a void in our image that must be filled.



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