



## Maryland Landmark Appraised by Professional Arborists

Most property owners, while fully appreciating the esthetic worth of their landscape, are unaware that established trees and other plantings have monetary value that is recognized by insurance companies, real estate specialists and even the Internal Revenue Service. However, an appraisal by a qualified professional is required in order to establish the validity of any claim, and guidelines have been laid down for conducting the appraisal.

Appraisers were recently asked to set a dollar value on the 400-year-old Wye Oak in Wye Mills, Maryland. Located on Maryland's eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, the famous tree is probably the oldest living white oak in this country and is truly a cherished American landmark.

The magnificent giant oak is a sight of such spectacular proportions as to almost defy measurement. It rises to a lofty 95 feet and has a crown span of 165 feet, more than half the length of a football field. At about nine feet above the ground, the trunk measures eight feet in diameter, and at a height of four-and-a-half feet, its circumference is 27 feet eight inches.

A sturdy picket fence encompasses the tree at approximately the dimension of its outer branch spread. The tree sits, along State

Highway 622, between a well-kept residence and an original one-room schoolhouse established in 1720. The tree is owned by the State of Maryland and is well maintained by the Maryland Park Service.

So what value did the consulting arborists place on this mighty oak? In a meticulously prepared official document, Fred Micha, writing for the arborists, stated in part:

Having carefully considered information and data pertinent to this tree's size, species, condition, location and other arboricultural factors, it is our opinion that the value of this tree is:

THIRTY-FIVE  
THOUSAND DOLLARS  
..... \$35,000.00

The document also described the tree as being in "fair condition."

It has a center core heartwood rot pocket. Thus it may be susceptible to wind throw and trunk breakage. It has had a constant maintenance program, being pruned and fertilized every two years. Its cabling system is extensive and properly done. One problem does arise in that it may become too top heavy and collapse at some future time. Possibly ground cables should be installed to prevent this type of destruction or damage. □

The appraisal went on to state that the tree had received constant maintenance for the past 25 years at an approximate cost of \$55 per year, thus increasing its value by \$12,500.

The report concludes by stating that this species of tree is capable of living to a thousand years and that the Wye Oak, with an established maintenance program, can probably be preserved for another 200 years.

"Such an appraisal as this can be objectively undertaken because of the professional guidelines that have been established," said Ray Gustin, Jr., a 50-year veteran of the tree service and nursery business in Silver Spring, Md. "These guidelines have been adopted by the American Society of Consulting Arborists, the American Association of Nurserymen, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, the International Society of Arboriculture, and the National Arborist Association." (Representatives from each of these comprise the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers.)

"The guidelines take into consideration species of plant, size, age, general health, location, site factors and individual professional judgment." Gustin worked with Micha and Dr. L. C. Chadwick in appraising the Wye Oak.

While the Wye Oak appraisal is a unique case, the practice of appraising trees and other landscape plantings is quite common. Property owners, recognizing the monetary value of their landscape, are increasingly calling in qualified tree and landscape professionals to make appraisals, which can be used in filing insurance claims and in taking income tax deductions in case of damage to their trees or other plants. These professionals can also help the owner by seeing things he might miss, helping to correct the damage and prescribing remedies the owner may be able to do himself. The savings which the landscape appraiser may effect can far outweigh the nominal cost of an inspection.

For further information on tree and landscape values, write The Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers, 232 Southern Building, Washington, D.C. 20005. □