

# ESTABLISHING A LOCAL ARBORISTS' ASSOCIATION

by Guy A. LeBlanc and Dennis K. Brown<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** A local arborists' association can provide additional benefits to arborists also belonging to national and state organizations, especially in large states. It also benefits the general public in its community, and ultimately the trees in the community's urban forest, by increasing awareness of the value of trees and of currently accepted arboricultural techniques. For such an organization to achieve its goals, it is necessary to create a set of guidelines for members and to have methods for recruiting members, raising funds, and informing the general public.

**Résumé.** Une association locale d'arboriculteurs peut fournir des avantages additionnels aux arboriculteurs aussi membres d'organisations nationale et d'état, surtout dans les grands états. Elle est aussi profitable au public dans sa communauté et, ultimement, aux arbres dans la forêt urbaine de la communauté, par l'augmentation de la prise de conscience sur la valeur des arbres et sur l'emploi des techniques arboricoles couramment acceptées. Pour qu'une telle organisation réalise ces buts, il est nécessaire de définir un ensemble de lignes directrices pour les membres et d'avoir des méthodes pour le recrutement des membres, la levée de fonds et l'information auprès du public en général.

In 1985, three arborists in Austin, Texas (including co-author Brown) established the Central Texas Arborists Association (CTAA). This was originally done in response to a desire shown by concerned local arborists to obtain information about the oak wilt disease (caused by *Ceratocystis fagacearum*) which is causing extensive oak losses in central Texas.

**Benefits of a Local Association.** Although most members of CTAA are also members of ISA and/or NAA, we believe arborists can further benefit from a local association for several reasons, particularly in large regions or states such as Texas. In such regions, the area covered by individual ISA chapters is so large that attending chapter meetings is difficult. The diversity in tree species, and therefore the types of problems arborists encounter are also greater in a larger area. Austin itself is located at the precise point of convergence of three different ecotones. Our association offers local arborists a chance to meet regularly to share knowledge and discuss problems pertinent to this extremely diverse area. This

has resulted in more of us working together more frequently, as we have become aware of the specialities that individual members perform.

Each month we hold a general membership meeting. The typical agenda includes a talk on a safety issue, introduction of a new or seasonally appropriate product, discussion on the development of any upcoming CTAA projects, and current reports on other activities, civil or governmental, that affect trees or arborists.

The highlight of these monthly meetings is our guest speaker. We are fortunate to have a large pool of people from whom we may request speakers. Previous speakers have included supervisors from city arborist and urban forestry departments, experts from universities such as Texas A&M, as well as from the private sector, and from within our own ranks, from generous members willing to share their knowledge. They have spoken to us on a variety of subjects from the oak wilt disease that forged our association to entomology, pathology, soil amending and local soil surveys.

In addition to the general meetings, we publish a monthly newsletter which keeps members up to date on meetings, conferences and workshops, as well as news about local arborists, conservation issues, and other topics related to trees.

**Purposes of the Association.** The founders of CTAA believed that the purposes of the association should extend beyond the education of arborists, however. Article Two of the association's constitution has remained basically the same since its creation:

- To promote and improve the practice of professional arboriculture.
- To promote public education and stimulate greater public interest in the planting and preservation of the urban forest.
- To initiate and support pertinent scientific investigation and to publish results of such research.

1. Second author: President, Central Texas Arborists Assn., P.O. Box 1625, Austin, Texas 78767.

- To recommend a Code of Ethics for those engaged in the profession.
- To sponsor meetings devoted to the exchange and presentation of information of interest and value to professional arborists and others interested in trees.

Towards this end, CTAA participates in several local plant and home oriented shows each year by providing free literature and advice to homeowners and other tree keepers on such topics as currently accepted arboricultural practices, how to choose a professional arborist, what tree species do best in our area, etc.

We believe that one of the most important things we can teach the general public is what is considered by most current standards the proper and most beneficial method of pruning trees. Towards this end we have held pruning demonstrations on several occasions, including previous Arbor Day events, which drew encouraging numbers of interested onlookers. These demonstrations were held on city property and sanctioned by the city's Urban Forestry department. In this way we hope to help the public recognize educated, conscientious professionals.

**Creating a Constitution.** Essential to the success of most organizations is the establishment of a set of guidelines which helps the group to maintain a focused direction. A set of by-laws is required by the IRS for those seeking non-profit status. CTAA sought and received this status because the founders believed that it would entice more tax deductible donations from corporations. Those interested in applying for non-profit status need federal form number 1024 and an abundance of patience.

The CTAA constitution outlines the association's purposes, its membership requirements, and its governmental body. The by-laws detail the election and duties of officers, payment of dues, dispersion of assets in the event of dissolution, and use of the association's name and logo.

One condition of our non-profit status is that anyone is allowed to become a member. We have developed a set of pruning standards (based on NAA standards) which we ask members to abide by, but it is not a condition of membership.

Our governmental body consists of a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and editor.

They are assisted by the immediate past president and a representative to the Austin Area Garden Council, which is a coalition of plant oriented groups of which CTAA is a member. Elections are held annually.

Two key points to our by-laws concern the use of the association's name and the dispersion of assets. Non-profit status requires an organization to state how assets will be dispersed upon dissolution. Section Five of our by-laws call for any remaining assets to be donated to the city's parks department "for the express purpose of planting trees."

Section Six of our by-laws states that no member may "use the logo or name in any form of advertising, selling or representation" that does not pertain directly to the function or activities of CTAA. Although most members of organizations such as this would like potential customers to know of their membership, the founders of CTAA are concerned that some may join for the sole reason of using their membership to imply qualifications they do not have. These concerns are validated by the fact that there are a few people in Austin who falsely claim membership in ISA. Others advertise licenses or claim certification even though there is no governmental or ISA licensing or certification programs in Texas. For these reasons we have chosen to deny members this privilege until we establish some type of certification program, should we decide to do so.

**Acquiring Members.** The most difficult challenge for CTAA has been acquiring and sustaining memberships. The initial mailing list for meeting notices was derived by the founders primarily from the Yellow Pages. They supplemented names found there with names of businesses advertising in the local papers, on nursery memo boards, and even on telephone poles. Agencies such as the city of Austin's urban forestry office, the local Texas Forest Service office, and several agricultural extension service offices were made aware of our existence and invited to attend our meetings and acquaint other interested persons with us. Five employees of these agencies are currently members.

Another way in which we solicit memberships is by word-of-mouth. Austin is a city of about 500,000 people, and it is quite common to come

across other arborists working around the city. In this way we have contacted potential members who operate as independent arborists but who rarely advertise, and hence could not be approached otherwise.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what percentage of arborists in this area our membership represents. To start with, there is no way of knowing exactly how many exist. Whether or not to consider as arborists those who claim to offer tree care in addition to a multitude of other services is another problem.

There is also the problem of how to discern what percentage of any given company is comprised of arborists, (versus secretaries, salesman, etc.). Table 1 shows our annual membership tallies compared against the number of companies listed in the Yellow Pages from twenty cities and towns in a nine county area. Only businesses that represented themselves as primarily offering tree care were counted.

**Table 1. Membership**

Year	A	B	C	D
1986	N.A.	15	15	27%
1987	N.A.	27	20	36%
1988	56	46	26	46%
1989	51	46	29	57%

A) Total number of companies listed in Yellow Pages.

B) Total number of CTAA members.

C) Number of companies represented by membership.

D) Percentage of listed companies membership represents. [<sup>'86 and '87 (not available) based on number of companies listed in '88.</sup>]

**Fund Raising.** The second most difficult challenge presented in maintaining an arborists association is raising funds. Although we are non-profit, no organization can expect to accomplish its goals without capital. In the first year or so of CTAA's existence, the sole source of our assets was membership dues. The founders began CTAA with membership dues of \$10 per year, a sum chosen to exclude no potential member on the basis of expense. However, we found that especially with as limited a membership as we had then, the amount generated couldn't even cover our newsletter expenses. We were fortunate to have two members who believed in our cause enough to sponsor the newsletter the first two years. It was then agreed that the annual dues

would be raised to \$25 per year. We also agreed to make all dues due on the first of the year, which spared us the confusion caused by our previous system in which members renewed their memberships exactly a year from whenever they joined.

The first fundraising technique employed by CTAA, besides collecting dues, was the sale of buttons, keychains, and similar trinkets at the shows and festivals at which we had booths. We simply displayed the items (such as "Think Trees" bumperstickers and acorn keychains carved from oak), and explained that the proceeds allowed us to continue supplying information to the public. This method continues to prove itself worthwhile.

Between an increase in dues and the sale of the above items, CTAA was easily able to meet its only expenses, the monthly newsletter and the informational flyers we distributed whenever we were before the public. Considering the future of the organization however, the officers for 1989 felt that in order to increase public awareness of our association it would be necessary to generate larger amounts of funds. To accomplish this, in July of that year, CTAA sponsored its first "General Tree Care Workshop".

We aimed the workshop at grounds maintenance personnel. We planned a day-long workshop in which several of our members would present forty minute programs covering various aspects of tree care, with an emphasis on proper pruning. We then designed a brochure, had it printed, and mailed it to a list of approximately 150 grounds maintenance and landscape companies, city, state and corporate grounds maintenance departments. We held the workshop at our meeting place and the surrounding grounds, by permission of the Austin Area Garden Council.

The workshop went smoothly, and over ninety per cent of the forty participants mailed in the anonymous evaluation forms we gave them. There comments were all positive, and most requested to be informed of future workshops. Since the workshop was quite successful in both educating those unfamiliar with tree care and in raising funds for CTAA, we intend to continue offering them.

**Use of Funds.** Finally, since we are non-profit, the funds raised must be used as CTAA claimed they would be. Most of our receipts still go towards the newsletter and flyers mentioned

previously. One way we intend to use our increased amount of funds is by creating a library for the membership. We purchased the first two books immediately after the workshop. The books will be kept at our meeting place, and will be available to members during the hours the center is open.

Towards public education, we are currently designing a brochure that will replace all the individual flyers we print. These will be given free to the public, and possibly dispersed in a mass mailing. As we increase our working capital in the future, there is the possibility that it will be used to increase the number of pruning demonstrations we perform.

### Summary

Everyone benefits from the existence of a local

arborists association. Certainly the members do, by way of education and public recognition. The public benefits as they are made knowledgeable about what a qualified arborist is and what proper tree care is. National associations such as ISA benefit when local associations encourage their members to join, as we certainly do. But the ultimate beneficiaries are the urban forest and individual trees that will have their health and environment improved as concern for them increases amongst the general public, and as those who work on trees become better educated about proper care.

*Arbor Vitae Tree Care*  
7115 Wishing Well Drive  
Austin, Texas 78745

## ABSTRACT

GERSTENBERGER, PETER. 1989. **Tree support systems.** *Grounds Maintenance* 24(9):42, 44, 46, 82, 86-87.

Near houses, automobiles and people, some trees may be hazards and liabilities for the owners. If a tree starts to break up, the owner must decide whether to remove it or prune out large parts of its canopy. Both options may be undesirable. Fortunately, there are other alternatives. For trees that are in reasonably good shape, guy wires, cables and rigid bracing are options that support and strengthen the trees. We use these mechanical systems to repair damaged trees and to help prevent or reduce future property damage and tree disfigurement. *Cable bracing* uses flexible, galvanized steel cable to support a weak fork—a narrow V-fork that develops when two equal-size branches originate at nearly the same point. Long, *horizontal* branches may need support, especially if internal decay has weakened them. Cable bracing uses strong tree limbs to lessen the burden of weak ones. *Rod or rigid bracing* uses lengths of various diameter steel rods threaded with wood screw or machine thread. Rod bracing provides additional, rigid support where a defect has developed in a fork, cavity, limb or trunk. It also can hold rubbing limbs together or spread them apart. *Guying* provides added support to established trees when roots are shallow or have been damaged and to very large, recently transplanted trees. When guying, you install cables between trees or between a tree and the ground. Periodically inspect cabling, bracing, and guying systems after installation. Look for deterioration of cabling material and for changes in the trees that could make adjustments necessary.