

# Utility Arborist Newsline

MAR/APR 2021

VOLUME 12

NUMBER 2

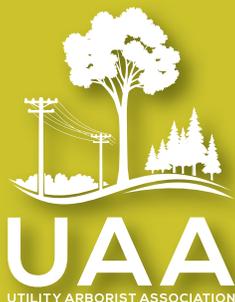
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## Workforce Diversity Strengthens Our Industry

By Roxie Lee, President, UTAW Group LLC

*The content of this article was presented during the Women in Vegetation Management Workshop at the virtual 2020 Trees and Utilities Conference on September 21, 2020.*

**FOCUS:  
DIVERSITY IS  
POWER**

Finding and sustaining a career in the vegetation management (VM) industry as a woman or a person of color is challenging. There are many avenues for employment in the industry yet finding the right opportunity within the current structure can be difficult. Race and gender often play a role in what position is offered, and many candidates encounter difficulty entering the infrastructure of companies that employ very few diverse candidates. Employment support, growth opportunity, and sometimes hostility from other employees deter well-qualified candidates from pursuing opportunities in the multitude of companies that provide products or services in the VM industry.

Employing diverse candidates in any business is a winning formula. Women and candidates of color bring professional and cultural experiences into the workforce that may lead to expanded business

opportunities. The “think tank” within the company begins to diversify in its thoughts and ideas and offers its customers options. We have all been witnesses to the stagna-

tion of concepts and suggestions when we approach a project with a familiar collective of ideas. We end up with the same product and the same results over and over. A diversity of people in a company’s personnel will challenge the workplace thought process, which allows the company to begin to put forth more innovative services and product offerings to its customers and the diverse public.

Management within VM-based companies must begin to challenge the background noise of statements like, *Customers will feel uncomfortable with a wom-*

*an, African American, Hispanic, or Asian representative or, I can’t find qualified, diverse candidates.* Customers want great service experiences. A well-established, knowledgeable employee with his or her company’s support will offer the best products and services to customers, who will be satisfied with the options. Diverse candidates’ credentials are as solid as *any* candidate’s  
(Continued on page 7)



Roxie Lee

# SAFER TOGETHER



## SAFETY IS MORE THAN JUST A NUMBER.

When we say safety is a value, it means more than spreadsheets and charts. It means coming together to ensure everyone goes home safe. From companywide training programs like Davey Performance Excellence to empowering crew level safety leadership, it means everyone has a role to play, and every day is a #safetyday.

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## President's Message

By Paul Hurysz

Fellow arborists, utility specialists, and UAA members, I hope and trust that you, your families, and teammates are doing well across the continent. It is amazing how versatile we can be in the most trying of times. By the time you read this, my hope and prayer is that the worst of this COVID-19 pandemic is behind us all. Then, we all face the challenge of figuring out what the "new normal" should be in its wake. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." I think this still holds true today amid the virus that we are confronted with. Fear can be healthy—to a certain degree—especially for those who truly don't understand the risks or hazards of the work that we perform. But fear can also be paralyzing. The solution, in my opinion, is to find the balance; otherwise, it will be difficult to define success from almost any standpoint.

As always, safety is a main priority. We are an essential workforce that this country depends on. So, my challenge to you this month is to practice hierarchical control when mitigating hazards, whether they are electrical, mechanical (chainsaws), processes (hazard tree removals), or even viruses. The most effective way to mitigate hazards is to remove or replace them. Unfortunately, it's not always practical to remove or replace an electrical hazard, such as an electrical conductor or its energy source that we all count on to sustain life. The same same holds true for a virus. The next best option is to engineer controls to isolate people from the hazard. Some good examples of engineered controls are chain breaks on chainsaws or safety bars on chippers. No doubt, these controls have saved many lives.

As far as the virus is concerned, consider getting the vaccine as an engineered solution or protection to mitigate a hazard. Last, but certainly not least, make sure that you take advantage of administrative and personal protective equipment (PPE) controls that our

*(Continued on page 4)*

COMING SOON!



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### The Utility Arborist Association Executive Board will be opening nominations for new board members soon.

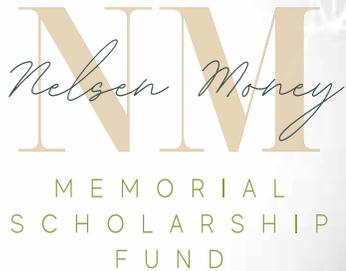
UAA members are encouraged to update their online profiles with current information (email, address, etc.) in the member portal (<https://www.gotouaa.org/member-portal/>) and prepare to submit nominations for the following UAA Executive Board open positions:

- Treasurer
- Vice President
- Directors (2 openings)



For more information, contact Diona Neeser at [dneeser@gotouaa.org](mailto:dneeser@gotouaa.org)

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Nelsen Money  
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Applications for the Nelsen Money Memorial Scholarship Fund are being accepted now through April 1, 2021.

Visit the UAA website for more info or email [office@gotouaa.org](mailto:office@gotouaa.org).



## President's Message

(Continued from page 3)

industry has to offer. These are really your last lines of defense for hazard mitigation. There is a reason why we don't pile 10 workers into a crew truck anymore—and it really has less to do with the pandemic and more with vehicle and personal safety (i.e., not enough seat belts). The same holds true with chainsaw chaps; can you be considered your brother's keeper if you allow someone to operate a chainsaw without chaps? Likewise, for virus protection—even if you've had the vaccine—make sure that you protect yourself and others around you with masks, clean hands, and by being aware of social distancing protocols for your sake and the sake of others.

This month's *Newsline* is focused on diversity. What does diversity mean to each of us? As diverse as we are in this country, you would probably get a lot of different answers. To some, diversity has a lot to do with race, religion, or sexual orientation. In an industry that practices diversity and inclusion, we must self-assess and see how we are upholding it. In my opinion, as it relates to diversity of thought, I'd say that our industry is strong. From my experiences, whether it be with the UAA, ISA, or the multitude of contractors, the brain trust of the industry seems to take, adapt, and adjust to feedback well as things change over time.

The UAA is also coming into its own regarding the support of professional and worker development (more to come on this in future issues of *Newsline*). Particularly, women in arboriculture is a movement that recognizes more diverse talents and continues to generate more interest each year, including in the utility vegetation management (UVM) arena.

Nothing is perfect and there is more to do. The key to our success is to continue to support the ongoing education and development for all, as well as renewing our focus on outreach. We need to be able to share what an exciting and challenging opportunity this is—to work as part of an essential workforce that our country depends on 24/7, 365 days a year. Thank you to all who are out there playing a significant role in making this happen. Until next time, take care and stay well!

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## Executive Director Comments

By Phil Charlton

### Shaping the Future of the UAA and UVM Industry

**G**rowth in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry has been overwhelming in recent years.

The growing demand for evermore tree and integrated vegetation management (IVM) workers has driven a growing demand for planners, inspectors, field managers, and more. UAA members have been clear about their desire to continue expanding the efforts of the UAA to help the industry address the challenges of recruitment, training, and retention.

To this end, the UAA has benefited from collaboration with UVMA, ISA, TCIA, Butte College, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, plus dozens of UAA members and their companies. Together, this group developed the Line Clearance Tree Worker Training Program, the Utility Vegetation Management Professional Development Program, and the UAA Professional Utility Vegetation Manager credential.

The UAA is committed to meeting the education and training needs of our industry. In 2020, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) made a unique commitment to support the industry and the UAA in ways that are changing the future of the industry. First, PG&E challenged Butte College and the UAA to build a tree worker training program; they then provided the funding for success. As many as 20 community colleges will be recruiting and training workers in the coming months. New entry-level line clearance workers will receive better, more consistent training while learning about the career opportunities in UVM. The third class of this program graduated this past January. This program will soon be available throughout California and it could be adopted by companies and community colleges nationwide.

With an increasing number of field workers comes the need for more well-prepared field technicians and managers. PG&E's commitment has included millions of dollars in scholarships for the UVM Certificate Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. These will be offered over the next three years.

We have found that one of the barriers for some students wishing to enter these training programs is the cost of reference materials. The scholarship funds are supporting a collaborative effort by the UAA and ISA to create a digital library for the UVM industry. ISA will be offering students of these two training programs greatly reduced pricing. The online digital library will initially include the following resources:

- Utility Specialist Certification Guide
- Best management practices (BMP) for pruning and utility pruning of trees, tree risk assessment, tree inventories, utility tree risk assessment, and closed chain of custody
- ANSI Z133 standard (currently available in digital format)
- BMP on IVM (anticipated this summer once the UAA and ISA complete the revision currently underway)

I always hesitate to highlight the services of just one company since so many support the UAA. PG&E's support in recent months, however, has given an amazing boost to our efforts. Better awareness about UVM and easier access to these programs will help us recruit and prepare the next generation. In the next few years, the industry will see thousands of new tree workers trained and hundreds receiving professional certificates as they participate in the UVM certificate program. I expect that these programs will play an important role in building a bigger, better, and more diverse UVM profession.

For more information on the UAA Nelsen Money Memorial Scholarship Fund, visit the UAA website or email [office@gotouaa.org](mailto:office@gotouaa.org).

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#### UVM Professional Development Program

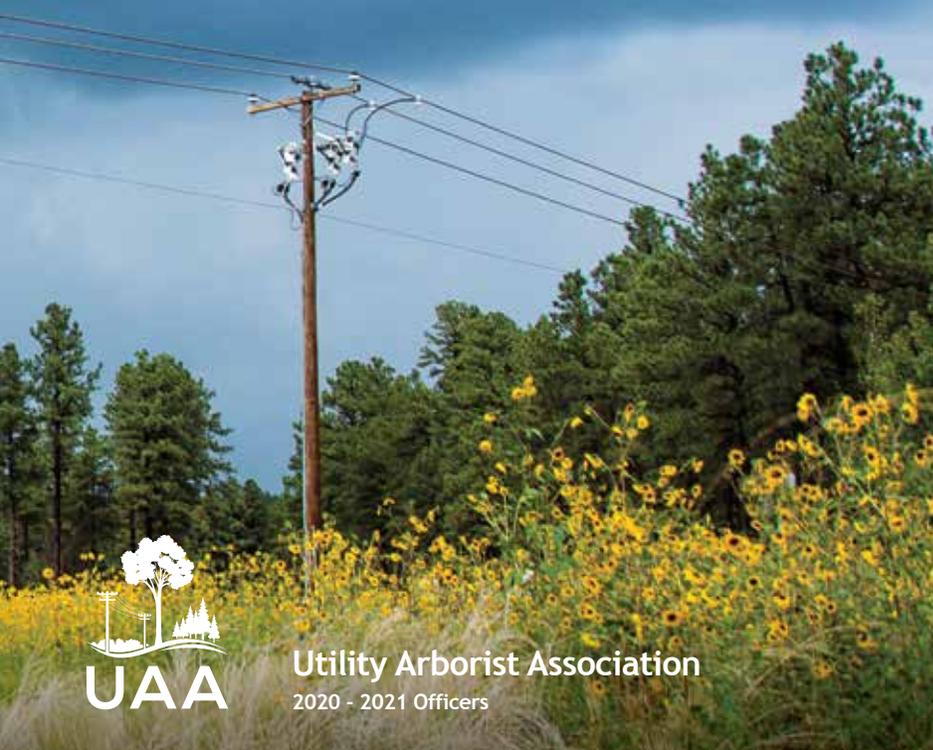


#### Wisconsin Forestry Center UVM Certificate Program



#### UVM Scholarship Program





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**FOCUS:  
DIVERSITY IS POWER**

**Workforce Diversity Strengthens Our Industry**

*(Continued from page 1)*

credentials, and companies that diversify their workforce offer a broader base of services and expanded products. Companies regimented in doing things the way that they have always been done will continue to miss opportunities to employ candidates who could bring a wealth of new, innovative ideas to a challenging industry.

Given the opportunity to work in a VM-related company, diverse candidates are provided career opportunities outside of a traditional company yet within the scope of what all employees have been trained to do: serve customers. Employing diverse candidates in the industry opens the door for companies to experience innovation, business growth, and a diversity of ideas, ultimately creating a culture in the company that values thinking outside of the box to come up with creative, valuable solutions to customer needs.



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# UAA Editorial Committee Update

By Renee Bissett, Chair of Editorial Committee | Director of Marketing and Communications, ACRT Services

The Editorial Committee update may have the least exciting update since each of you see our progress when you read this publication. In fact, it is our only task, producing six issues of the *Utility Arborist Newslines* annually. Since the last time we checked in, we have had a lot of change. We lost our leader, Nelsen Money, in May of 2020. He had been the heart and soul of our group since this committee began, leaving a huge gap to fill. It took our team a while to find our footing and we are now forging ahead and making our own way.

We were also challenged to be more inclusive, visually depicting the diversities across our industry. Everyone stepped up to the task, providing more variety of authors, showcasing the many different faces that make up our industry, and seeking content from voices often not heard from within our organization. Although it is a work in progress, we hope that you have noticed the shift in content and creators. Know that you are always welcome to contribute to this publication. Reach out to any of us on the committee and we can work with you to provide content.

Each year, we set out to provide themes for each issue. Some topics are so important that they are included with every publication (e.g., safety and environmental stewardship), lining up with our strategic priorities. As you have already read in the last issue, we kicked off 2021 dedicated to trends and best management practices.

We took our challenge of inclusion and diversity even further: making this entire issue on that subject. This means diversity in gender, age, ethnicity, and all that you think of when you hear the term. It also means diversity of the types of companies outside of utilities; it means including utilities of all sizes, not just investor-owned electric providers. Not all of us are arborists, so it also includes those of us who round out the industry in other disciplines. We hope that you will see that diversity is power.

Our partnership with T&D World continues, producing a joint effort supplement in June. It takes nearly a year of planning to produce and is mailed out to both of our distribution lists. Our publication will focus on safety.



## Editorial Committee Members

- Renee Bissett, *Chair* (ACRT Services)
- John Wasmer, *Champion* (ACRT Services)
- Diona Neeser (UAA)
- Phil Charlton (UAA)
- Renée Phillips (UAA)
- Amy Fischbach (T&D World)
- Laura Ribas (Lewis Tree)
- Michelle Vignault (Clearion)
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- Guy Vogt (PSGE)
- Darrell Daniel (SMUD)
- Britta Roppe (Wright Service Corp.)
- Steve Hilbert (Asplundh)
- Ben Troychak (Quantum Spatial)
- Lori Jones (Salt River Project)
- Nadia Geagea Pupa (Pique Publishing, Inc.)
- Lindsay Denney (Pique Publishing, Inc.)

We had a record number of abstracts submitted last year providing additional content from other outlets. The theme of their publication is still being decided at the time of this printing. We anticipate another content-packed issue, a favorite of many.

We will round out the rest of 2021 with issues on safety (May/June), crisis management (July/August), environmental stewardship (September/October), and the evolution of technology (November/December). Think about how you might be able to contribute to these topics and reach out to us to share your story. We might just print it.

I've been on a lot of committees within the UAA over the years and I'm really proud to be a part of the Editorial Committee. If you want an active, engaged group, this is it. They are a team of hard-working, thoughtful, and dedicated individuals. Without them, the quality of this publication would not be the same. Thank you to each of them.

## Attracting Gender-Balanced Talent

By Josiane Bonneau, Chief Operating Officer, Wildlife Habitat Council

It is no secret that utility vegetation management (UVM) is a male-dominated profession. The field may be a victim of its own identity, sitting at the intersection of five sectors that each took decades to embrace gender inclusivity: science, forestry, management, utilities, and corporate America. This disparity is never more apparent than at conferences and summits, where women are significantly outnumbered by their male colleagues. While the events of the past 12 months canceled many professional gatherings, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) have remained at the forefront during what can only be described as a socially turbulent year. Luckily, the UAA is championing the issue and progress is attainable.

The business case for workplace diversity has long been empirically demonstrated: financial outperformance, innovation, superior value creation, better decision-making, and the list goes on. As strategic DE&I campaigns are launched from the top, many leaders are eager to find solutions. Fortunately, when it comes to fostering gender equality in the workplace, there are many tangible approaches to recruiting, hiring, retaining, and elevating women.



Charlie Devrise, ITC Holdings Corp.; Martha Holzheuer, Nature Niche LLC (third row); Iris Caldwell, University of Illinois-Chicago (front); and Jack McCabe, Davey Resource Group (second row) are a dedicated group of practitioners, who have been welcoming and interested in bringing new faces to the UAA.

### Balanced Job Postings

For more women to be employed in the industry, we first need to increase the pool of gender-diverse applicants. Job postings, like marketing advertisements, need to be adapted to the target audience. Although hiring managers seldom have control over official position descriptions, they generally have influence over how public postings are crafted. These postings can take an inclusive approach by reflecting the following best management practices (BMPs):

**Conciseness and Clarity.** The ideal job posting should read unambiguously and be between 300-800 words (a few scrolls on a mobile screen). If needed, it can link to a longer technical position description. Acronyms and overly used buzzwords such as thinking

outside the box, KPI, or leveraging critical resources can be devoid of relatable meaning, alienating candidates before they're even invited to interview.

**Prerequisites.** Research suggests that men often feel comfortable applying for jobs if they meet 60% of listed requirements, whereas women apply only if they meet nearly 100% of the required and preferred qualifications combined. Based on these findings, long lists of lofty requirements should be avoided. Instead, highlight a few essential hard and soft skills that can be demonstrated through a range of backgrounds. In some human resource circles, years of experience are considered the worst predictor of performance. Consider adopting language such as "seeking experienced manager" over "seeking



The Women in Vegetation Management workshop shows the growing representation of females within the industry.

## The Power of Family: The Smiths in UVM

Across our organization, we think of our team members as a family. Often, the experiences of one person leads to his or her significant other coming aboard as well. That was the case for Devin and Regina Smith—ACRT Services employees who provide dedicated support to ACRT Pacific.

The Smiths own a ranch in California. When Devin was injured in an auto accident and on disability from his job at a logistics company, he became the ranch caretaker. Enjoying the outdoor work, he decided to put his degree in fisheries and wildlife biology to use in a new career. He applied to our organization to work in the best office on earth: the great outdoors.

Regina is no stranger to vegetation management (VM); she spent more than 20 years in utility tree services. When Regina was looking for her next opportunity, she remembered the positive things that Devin said about his new company and decided to join up.

Today, the Smiths work in different departments—Devin in fleet management and Regina in finance— but share a similar appreciation for our organization and the role it plays in the industry.

“The ACRT Services family of companies is great to work for,” Devin said. “They make you feel like you’re part of the

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Devin and Regina Smith

family. I never knew people did this type of work and all the technical aspects that go into it. It’s an enriching career.”

“You can’t go wrong with a company like this,” Regina said. “Everyone I’ve spoken with is friendly, helpful, and happy. The organization is truly filled with positivity.”

Outside of work, the Smiths enjoy hunting, fishing, caring for pets and livestock, working out, and spending time with family.

Explore career opportunities across the ACRT Services organization at [careers.acrt.com](https://careers.acrt.com).

manager with a minimum of seven years of experience.”

**Avoiding Unconscious Bias.** Gender-coded words inherently influence how candidates react to a posting. Masculine-coded words are proven to deter women from submitting their candidacy, whereas the use of feminine-coded words leads to an influx of applicants of all genders.

**Transparency.** In the job search, women typically express different priorities than men. To capture female candidates’ interest, postings must include statements speaking to company culture, flexibility in schedule and work locations, advancement opportunities, and remuneration. Posting salary ranges sends a clear message of transparency and parity when it comes to compensation. It will pay off.

### A Clear Commitment to Diversity

Jobseekers typically explore a company’s online presence early in the

application process. As they browse, they gauge whether a company’s values and identity are in line with their own. Therefore, it is important that an organization’s website and social media accounts project a culture of inclusivity, resonating with a diverse array of candidates. Female employees’ testimonials make for impactful narratives. Post images that reflect the gender balance that you are seeking. Gender balances are equally important to consider in print publications—the *Utility Arborist Newsline* is a good example. Reading this issue and other recent ones, you may notice a more even gender representation than there was 18 months ago when the topic was animatedly discussed at the Women in Vegetation Management (VM) workshop.

Because conveying culture through a website has its limitations, it is a practice that is best paired with robust networking so that talented individuals already know about the business and its climate. Building a pipeline of women candidates

has been successful in other non-traditional sectors. Consider expanding the student intern or co-op initiatives that are typically reserved for engineers to incorporate forestry, ecology, and sustainability programs, to participate in women-centric events and supporting STEM in your local communities.

### Building Momentum

The impact that the global pandemic has had on women’s job prospects and work-life balance is well-documented; in the past year, a disproportionate number of women have left the workforce altogether. To avoid undermining decades of progress, now is the time to implement measures to not only attract women to VM, but also how to retain female employees by addressing their needs and values. Through hiring women, forging clear pathways to advancement, and providing them with a culture that they can take pride in, we can create a cohort of female industry leaders to shape the field’s future.



## Writing Prescriptions for Success: Contemplating the Surrounding Landscape

*By Nikki Hill, Consultant, Grow With Trees*

**T**he need to adapt land management practices to protect and enhance the resilience of habitats is being acknowledged by many individuals and organizations. How can we change the modern paradigm of mitigating for environmental degradation so that our actions are in sync with ecosystem dynamics?

This paradigm shift requires us to broaden our view of what we are trying to achieve. In a landscape that has become increasingly fragmented by a patchwork of disjointed land use, we need to defragment our vision of land management. Many land use designations serve a single use that is overlaid regardless of existing conditions on the ground, even though landscape continuity is the result of many dynamic interactions. As utilities strive to both keep the lights on and encourage pollinator pathways, our success lies in participating in these interactions to integrate right-of-way (ROW) habitats within the surrounding landscape.

By considering the surrounding landscapes that border a utility span, vegetation managers can assess ecological



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a utility corridor transects, these strips can be gradual or abrupt habitat edges between two or more landscape types. Abrupt edges are both hard to maintain and can be challenging for wildlife. A mosaic of gradual transitions meshes with the surrounding landscape facilitates movement between them. Landscape-informed prescription planning ensures a broader range of habitat niches for birds and pollinators.

Consideration of the surrounding landscape and the position of a particular span within that landscape can aid vegetation managers in selecting the appropriate early successional habitat to aim for, since the surrounding landscape determines what is most likely to be supported in the utility corridor. The position of the utility span within the landscape can also inform prescriptions. Spans traversing hilltops will have shallower soils and different potential vegetation than those crossing valley bottoms. Terrain transitions from slopes to valley bottoms are natural moisture sinks, providing opportunity to manage for unique habitat niches.

Considering what the greater ecoregion is supporting can further inform management prescriptions; what pollinators, birds, and other wildlife already live or migrate within the

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area? Many pollinators need open spaces with a diversity of flowers for food but also nearby woody areas for roosting; migratory songbirds need the conditions that early successional habitats provide but also require adequate dense vegetation cover to successfully nest. A continuity in the mosaic of habitats enables pollinators and other wildlife to migrate as they need to and not become isolated in fragmented patches.

Rather than constantly battling with vigorous regrowth, vegetation management (VM) can be directed towards a more relatively stable habitat state that responds to a lighter touch. By setting our sights beyond the ROW, a picture of writing prescriptions for success emerges.

influences and functions, and such knowledge can contribute to the ease of upkeep. Utility corridors are basically narrow strips of potential early successional habitat and, depending on the landscape that

Figure 1. This table lists five basic early successional habitats that are well suited to utility ROW.

Habitat Type	Terrain Description	Plant Communities	Landscape Associations
Meadow	Flat to rolling with shallow ground water	Grasses and herbaceous species	Greenbelts, urban areas, roadsides, agriculture lands, wire zones, valley bottoms
Old Field	Flat valleys and hilltops left fallow after cultivation	Grasses, forbs, and scattered shrubs/trees	Agriculture, transitions from hills to lowlands
Emergent Wetland	Flat to rolling with saturated soils and some standing water	Wet-loving shrubs: willows, dogwood and alders, lush herbaceous layer	Standing water, soggy soil, and wetlands
Wildlife Crossing Corridor	Valley crossings, riparian stream corridors, and near utility towers	Dense shrubs or tall grasses, forested valleys, and riparian corridors that connect habitats	Spans that fragment continuous landscapes, valley crossings, strips of intact dense vegetation for cover
Arrested Shrubland	Sloped to flat drier soil sites	Low growing shrubs: closed canopy or dense patches with grassy runs	Forest to meadow transition, fragmented forest, border zones, lake, and river edges

# Research Corner

## RESEARCH STUDIES: TECHNICAL REVIEW



Technical review by Dr. Anand Persad, Director of Research, Science, and Innovation, ACRT Services

## ***A Review of Herbicide Use Rates over Four Treatment Cycles: Proof the IVM Tool Is Working***

By John Gwozdz, Lewis Payne, Kendra Gorski, and Jim Kooser

*This is a technical summary based on a peer-reviewed article that was published in the Environmental Concerns in Rights-of-Way Management, 11th International Symposium (p. 127-133) in September 2015.*

Integrated vegetation management (IVM) generally leads to reduced herbicide use when practiced over time. Rights-of-ways (ROW) under an IVM-dedicated program at the New York Power Authority (NYPA) was studied after four treatment cycles, each lasting four years, beginning in 1998.

### ● **Methods**

IVM strategies at NYPA are based on an inventory prescription treatment strategy of vegetation management (VM). Prescribed treatments included the following:

- Cut-and-treat
- Low-volume foliar (LVF)
- Low-volume foliar/cut-and-treat combination
- Stem-selective foliar
- Cut-no-treat
- Selective trim
- Mow-no-treat
- Mow-and-treat-later
- Selective foliar (SF)

While these treatments were prescribed during the inventory process the year prior to treating, plans allowed for adjustments at the treatment time if field conditions had changed. Data used in planning was detailed and involved plant identity, density, and other factors, including height and compatibility along with site characteristics—both ecological and land use. Benchmarks were relevant to label driven-high rates of products—pre-inventory rates based on earlier system-wide experience and historic regional rates in the same geographical area that were finishing just as this work began.

### ● **Results and Conclusions**

NYPA was able to effectively assess and compare herbicide use rates over several chronological periods in the same geography. Pre-inventory sample datasets identified hotspot treatments of high-intensity targets using SF, and comparisons were made between the LVF made today and the less-selective methods of the past. Today, application rates of Rodeo and Arsenal products were reduced in high-density sites by one-third compared to similar use products (e.g., Garlon and Tordon) in the 1990s. Not only were the rates lowered, but the chemistries in use today have lower environmental persistence. Historical benchmark assessments reveal that change in similar-use product delivery tactics can significantly lower herbicide use rates from 6 gal./acre (helicopter) to 1-2 gal./acre (basal) and 1 gal./acre (SF).

These data are encouraging and demonstrate that sustainable goals when using IVM over time can be realized. The IVM maturity goals of overall higher-density ground cover with desirable plants result from a program that encourages biological control and ultimately promotes habitat quality. Herbicides are a tool in IVM and datasets, such as the ones presented here, and display evidence that with prudent, periodic removal of non-compatibles with herbicides, we can realize healthy ROWs, rich biodiversity, and more sustainable results in the longer term.

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## Recruiting for Diversity: Attracting an Inclusive Team

By Jenna Paul, Technical Writer, Davey Resource Group Inc.

**W**hy choose to intentionally cultivate a diverse workforce? It has been proven that industries with diverse workplaces benefit from greater revenue and increased opportunities as a result. There are myriad reasons why this is the case, from introducing varied perspectives to reaching a wider talent pool. Moreover, we have a deeper responsibility to create a culture in the utility industry that welcomes and attracts diversity. Unfortunately, there is currently a disparity in the proportions of women and minority employees in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry.

Given that only 22% of jobs in this industry are filled by women, there is a distinct opportunity to improve diversity. The reason for this and the disproportionate number of minority employees in the industry is vital to investigate before planning and pursuing solutions. One such reason is a general, false perception that UVM is a narrow, shallow field. Being able to advertise the rich history and broad range of opportunities available in the UVM industry can entice an audience with different backgrounds and interests.

Besides improving the understanding of what UVM encompasses, emphasizing and demonstrating its value and purpose is equally vital. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to highlight the necessity and attractive qualities of UVM. Since the virus hit, those deemed essential workers have received well-deserved attention and praise for their commitment to critical tasks. When the country is in lockdown, electricity still has to be transported safely and reliably to homes, airports, hospitals, etc. UVM employees keep the electric grid running, and their designation as

essential workers should be a proud aspect of the position and touted to prospective employees as such.

In addition to communicating the value and purpose of UVM to a wider range of candidates, recruiting methods can generate additional interest and curb bias. Evaluating the diversity of your current team is a necessary first step. Once you've determined the strengths and weaknesses that you have in this area, discuss your hiring goals with recruiters. With this established, focus on networking that that will reach and attract diverse candidates. These talking points, along with a discussion of your commitment to an inclusive, diverse work environment can help develop interest for job seekers.

An industry's reputation will always precede it; maintaining a thriving, inclusive workplace is even more important than merely cultivating it. Fortunately, the programs, attitudes, and training that contributes to maintaining a diverse workforce are largely the same as those that generally improve employee satisfaction. These include providing mentorship, work-life balance programs, and a safe environment free from discrimination or harassment. Celebrating cultural differences and creating policies that honor them are specific to diversity and important additions.

Recruiting a diverse workplace is valuable simply because it is the right thing to do. Beyond that, it opens doors and enriches the industry. Identifying gaps and setting goals to fill them are prerequisites for creating more gender and racial diversity within the UVM industry. Strategic focus on this target from key players can start to affect a change with lasting, positive effects that will strengthen the UVM industry for the future.



# The Power of Diversity

By Jennifer Arkett, Retired Manager of Vegetation Management, Duquesne Light Company

The content of this article was presented during the Women in Vegetation Management Workshop at the 2019 Trees and Utilities Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, on September 10, 2019.



English poet William Cowper wrote, “Variety’s the very spice of life, / That gives it all its flavor.” Variety—also referred to as diversity—is the “spice of life” that keeps us engaged.

beetle-born fungus known as Dutch elm disease. In the early 2000s, city streets lined with mature ash trees in Toledo, Ohio, were devastated by the invasion of the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*).

Vegetation managers are experts in recognizing the true benefits of diversity. We understand the importance of the relationship between biodiversity and sustainability. The vast integration of all life forms on Earth, the communities that they form, and habitats in which they live and thrive provide many benefits. In general, diversity boosts ecosystem productivity and stability where all species play an important role. By increasing the number of species, we can increase variety and natural sustainability for life forms. All ecosystems are vulnerable to

mistrust often prevents us from sharing our respective knowledge. So, what are our options? We can choose to isolate ourselves and become judgmental or we can interact and be curious about fresh perspectives and explore how to integrate our wisdom and experience. Today’s multigenerational workforce is composed of the following age groups:

- **Traditionalist Generation:** Defined as those born between the mid-1920s to mid-1940s; referred to as “Veterans” or “Silents.” Known for self-sacrifice,

## “Variety’s the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavor.”

What is diversity? It’s the broad range of our differences that include, but are not limited to:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Color
- Ethnicity
- Gender identity
- Socio-economic status
- Sexual orientation
- Physical and mental abilities
- Religious/ethical values
- Personality traits

Throughout time, we have seen diversity in nature and in our role as human influencers. Nature repeatedly demonstrates that diversity adds strength to our world. We have seen the detriments from the lack of diversity in nature and these experiences must not be forgotten, as aesthetic, economic, and environmental impacts can be devastating to all forms of life. For example, in the 1960s in Burlington, Vermont, streets that were formerly lined with the magnificent American elm (*Ulmus americana*) were devastated by a

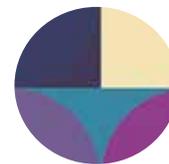
collapse without diversity. We understand the benefits of diversity in nature, but what about diversity in the workplace? This diversity is the collective mix of people who contribute to the workplace and its work efforts through their vast range of backgrounds, experiences, and talents. English-born writer Mary Ann Evans—known by her pen name of George Eliot—wrote, “It is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view.”

Of the many human differences, let us focus on age demographics. Today’s diverse workforce is comprised of five distinct generational age groups. We need to examine what we have to offer each other and contribute to the whole. For many,

respect for authority, and work as its own reward. Influenced by WWII, the Korean War, the Space Age, and the Great Depression.

- **Baby Boomer Generation:** Defined as those born between the mid-1940s to mid-1960s; characterized by ambition, hard work, and wanting to make a difference. These individuals appreciate competition and effective communication.

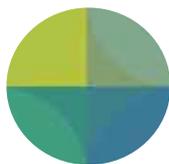
Historically, this group makes up one of the largest generations. Influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Cold War with Russia, and space travel.



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- **Generation X:** Defined as those born between the early 1960s to early 1980s; referred to as the “latch-key generation” with reduced supervision, primarily due to high divorce rates and dual parents in the workforce. These individuals were the first to ask for work-life balance in the workplace. Influenced by MTV, the Watergate scandal, the energy crisis, and the end of Cold War with Russia.
- **Millennial Generation:** Defined as those born between the early 1980s to 2000; the “everybody wins” generation who never knew a time when technology was not present in their lives. This group is incredibly idealistic, pragmatic, hopeful, social, and determined to change the world. Influenced by digital media, terrorist attacks, school shootings, divorce, and omnipresent parental protection.
- **Generation Z:** Defined as those born in the 2000s and after; referred to as “Zoomers.” Have never known a world without cell phones and computers. They are savvy consumers and suffer from eco-fatigue and ways to save the planet. This group will likely be a generation larger than the Baby Boomers. Influenced by the American melting pot of cultures and behaviors.



Should these generational descriptions be permitted to define us? In reality, we are all more similar than we are different. We commonly share the same wants and values. We want to perform work that makes a difference in a supportive and flexible atmosphere with appreciation given for a job well done. Pigeonholing people into generational categories only serves to neglect other talents that those individuals may possess.

How do we manage the challenge of generational divides? Diversity is so important in the workplace. Work efforts must be inclusive and welcome the contribution of all generations. Human differences define us as individuals. Differences are everything that we are or are not, and they make each of us unique. Acceptance of these human differences shows respect for the dignity and worth of every person, hence leading to inclusion and a sense of belonging in their environment.

Inclusion in the workforce amplifies a person’s sense of belonging to their environment. Strategic approaches and attitudes are an integral part of workplace culture

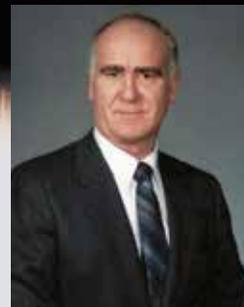
*(Continued on page 21)*

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### Henry Thibodeau: Remembering an Innovator



We would like to honor and acknowledge the passing of an industry icon and mogul at Lucas Tree Experts: Henry “Hank” Thibodeau. He worked for Lucas Tree for 52 years, during which he improved working conditions, spearheaded safety programs, and shared his knowledge for arboriculture.

In 1924, Thibodeau was born in Allagash, Maine, on the Canadian border. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as a radar operator. Thibodeau graduated from the University of Maine and, being an avid outdoorsman, began his career at Lucas Tree Experts in 1950.

Thibodeau spent 52 years at Lucas Tree and was extremely dedicated to improving working conditions and the safety of frontline workers exposed to hazards while working around electric utilities, especially during hurricanes and winter conditions. He was instrumental in starting Lucas Tree’s first safety program and began incorporating some of the first bucket trucks used in the state to improve safety and efficiency. Thibodeau spent 45 years as a member and officer of the Maine Arborist Association and was appointed to the Maine Arborist Examining Board for 16 years. He was a founding member on the Maine Pesticide Board, and also worked with Dow Agrosiences to introduce some of the first integrated vegetation management (IVM) techniques used in Maine. He was a very spiritual man and loved people, nature, and being a steward of our environment.

Thibodeau served as the first vice president for Lucas Tree Experts and has forever left his mark on our company and our industry in the state of Maine. He always put the needs of family, country, and industry ahead of his own and served as an inspiration and mentor to many leaders at the company today.



You will be missed, Hank.  
Thank you for your service.

The Lewis logo is displayed in a red, italicized, sans-serif font within a white rectangular box.

“What I love most about working at Lewis is that we are like a family. Everyone in my yard is so different but all come together as one.”

-Nallely Villa



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Nallely graduated from St. Mary’s University in 2019 and interned as a Groundsperson and fell in love with working outdoors. She has grown both personally and professionally since joining Lewis and recently celebrated being promoted to Project Facilitator.

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Learn more about Nallely’s story at <https://careers.lewistree.com/us/en/blogarticle/nallely-villa> or scan the QR code.



*The Power of Diversity (Continued)*

and must be established and promoted throughout the organization. This inclusive culture ensures that employees are not excluded because of their differences. Individuals must have a sense of belonging in an environment where their differences are recognized and openly supported.



Diversity impacts performance and we need to become more tolerant and comfortable with it in order to succeed. Diverse and empowered employees are more likely to challenge one another and explore innovative opportunities. Vast information can be generated through this innovation—some ideas may work, some will not. Based on viable information, management has greater intelligence to make good, solid business decisions. The result is a win-win collaborative situation for all involved. Be a catalyst for diversity.

Author Nilofer Merchant recommends that we meet people in their “onlyness,” the place where only they stand. For example, you may work with an angry boomer approaching retirement who seems threatened by younger employees and fears the next steps in his or her life. If so, offer grace and patience to those unsure of their future. And for a Gen Xer who always seems tired and disconnected, recognize that juggling three children plus their school, activities, and well-being with only two hands is an overwhelming challenge. This is an exercise for your understanding and patience. And lastly, the millennial individuals seem to believe that it is all about them. Their sense of entitlement prompts them to ask for a pay raise within months after starting with an employer. Understand that this generation has more debt coming out of college than any other generation before them and these financial burdens are stressful.



As humans, we often believe that our first impression tells us what we need to know about the individual, but in reality, we most likely have only scratched the surface and need to walk in that person’s shoes before we make hasty judgments or conclusions. The very things that make you different may be your strengths. Encourage yourself and others to get to know your coworkers and learn what makes them different; you may discover someone who influences and motivates you to do your absolute best.

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**The Importance of Preparing**

Take a minute to think about your career in the tree industry and ask yourself how many times you’ve been in the line of fire—when an object traveled into your path, creating a risk of serious injury. Did you have time to readjust? Did you get lucky and escape without injury?

At Lewis Tree Service, we’re gaining an increasing clarity that when things go wrong in our high-risk industry, they go wrong quickly. We often hear, *It happened so fast*. A limb rotated in an unplanned direction; a branch bounced out of the drop zone in an unplanned direction; a tree barber chair occurred. When things are in motion, there’s no way to buy time. This is different from work in other industries (like manufacturing and healthcare) where once an unplanned event occurs, there’s time to consult and figure things out.

To create safety (and not rely on luck), we must always prepare, establishing the failure side of safety upfront. We recognize that no one wants to fail. However, given the level of variability and risk inherent in our work, we also know that it’s better to fail safely. This means that we need to pay extra attention to our escape route when felling trees. It also means, before beginning work, that we need to talk through with team members all of the things that could possibly go wrong on the job site and what actions you could take with each event. Simply having those discussions will increase everyone’s level of awareness and may prompt you to develop a better plan.

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## Lessons Learned in Starting a Diversity and Inclusion Committee

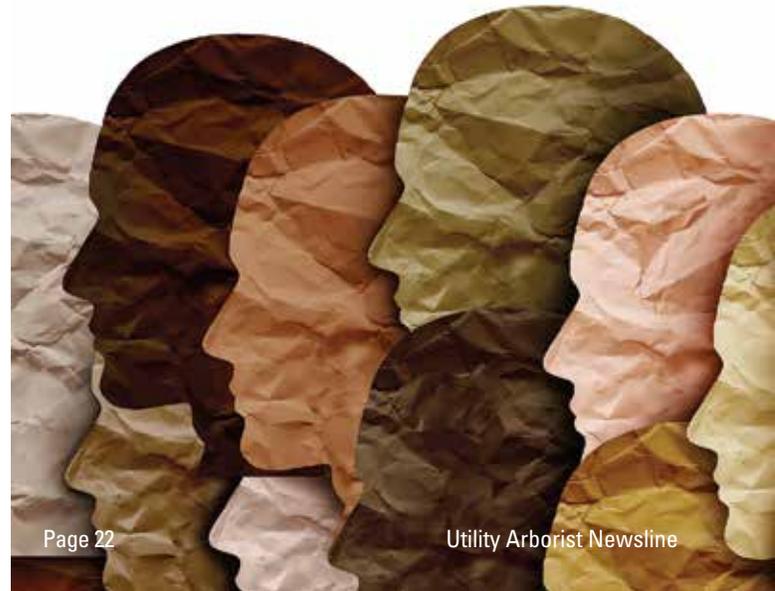
*By the CNUC Diversity and Inclusion (D+I) Committee*

Diversity and inclusion (D+I) can be intimidating topics for people and organizations. Nobody wants to misstep or offend, which can lead to avoiding the topics altogether. But avoidance can do more harm than good. Lack of diversity and inclusion harms organizations and the workforce, and we won't be able to improve if we don't address the topic with honest and open communication. Together we can gain comfort in the discourse around D+I. This is our main reason for forming the CNUC D+I Committee. We'd like to start by making it clear: we are not experts on D+I. CNUC is in the process of figuring it out, like everyone else. However, we feel that sharing our journey of focusing on our D+I might help others who are earlier on the path.

First, let's talk definitions so that we're speaking the same language. At CNUC, diversity is any dimension that can be used to differentiate people from one another. It's about counting and empowering people with respect and appreciation for what makes them different. Inclusion is the organizational effort and practices in which groups or individuals with different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted, welcomed, and equally treated. For us, inclusion is about a sense of belonging. The process of inclusion engages each individual and makes people feel valued as essential to the success of our organization *because of*—not *despite of*—the diversity they bring to the table.

### Looking Within

To start a D+I committee, you must first have a desire to focus on your organization's D+I. For CNUC, like many organizations, 2020 provided a moment for introspection.



Admittedly, it can be difficult to look at yourself and your company and say, *We could and should do better*. For CNUC, 2020 gave us an opportunity to look at our core values and examine if we were living them out as strongly as we could. Two of our core values stood out in relation to D+I: (1) family—our foundation that creates our intense employee focus and (2) integrity—doing the right thing and abiding by the highest ethical standards. In your organization, other core values or principles may apply.

It is important to note that examining and improving D+I culture is not just the right thing to do but benefits your workforce and your organization. D+I is about bringing the best talent into your organization and not excluding people, even if unintendedly, from the opportunity to contribute. Studies show that having diverse ideas and perspectives in your organization can pay off.

### Impact for Organizations

A 2018 study by Boston Consulting Group surveyed 1,700 companies in eight countries, across a variety of industries and company sizes, and looked at perception of diversity at the management level. As a part of that study, they zoomed in on innovation, looking at the percentage of total revenue from new products and services launched in the past three years, and found a strong statistically significant correlation between the diversity of the management team and overall innovation. In the study, companies with above-average diversity on their management teams reported innovation revenue 19% higher than companies with below-average diversity in leadership (Lorenzo et. al, 2020).

The World Economic Forum has reported that by the year 2025, 75% of the global workforce will be made up of millennials (Eswaran, 2019). Millennials highly value diversity, particularly in the workplace. In the 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, they found that millennials working for employers who were perceived to have a more diverse senior management team were 16% more likely to stay with the organization for five or more years. This is even more pronounced when looking at the diversity of

the workforce. Those working for organizations that had a higher perceived workforce diversity were 42% more likely to stay with that organization for five or more years, compared to companies that were not diverse (Deloitte, 2018).

### Commitment from Leadership

To find success in D+I, you need to get buy-in from leadership to ensure that there is a long-term commitment to change. The studies previously mentioned, and others like them, can help to build a strong business case. In addition, you may consider polling your own employees or examining trends within your organization; do you have higher turnover in female or minority groups? If so, you may have an inclusion issue. Do you even *have* enough female or minority employees to turn over? Then, start working on diversity.

Leadership's role is to set the tone. Start by setting a foundation—the unglamorous part. If you want to start a D+I committee, you need to define the committee's purpose, structure, makeup, and objectives. What is your organization's definition of D+I? As an example, the objectives of CNUC's D+I Committee are to:

- Examine programs, activities, policies, procedures, communications, and practices to determine intentional or unintentional exclusiveness or inequity
- Recommend approaches regarding D+I
- Engage employees in dialogues regarding D+I

### Recruiting Membership

After the foundation is set and you have some formalization established, you need a committee. Do you have employees who are interested in participating? Ensure that you are engaging employees at all levels, not just management. You do, however, want to show that management is supportive and receptive to ideas, so make sure to have some level of engagement with management. A single member of our management team chairs our committee, and the remaining members are field employees along with representation from HR and Marketing. To engage



management further, we have established management sponsorship for initiatives. This not only keeps our management team engaged, but builds support and accountability for the committee.

One key takeaway for us in establishing our initial committee is the importance of accepting different levels of commitment since participants will have varying levels of time to contribute; after all, most of our committee is formed with time and material (T&M) employees. We also found that our committee naturally formed with diversity. We do feel it's important to make attempts to ensure that your committee is representative of the diversity of your organization. Look beyond obvious diversity like gender and race and by considering age, location, education, experience, and others.

### Charting the Course

This is where the rubber meets the road. We hit a few interesting challenges in determining what initiatives our committee would work on. First, we found that our group had a lot of ideas. This was exciting and built up a lot of momentum, and we had amazing brainstorming sessions. Then, it became overwhelming. Yes, we had a lot of great ideas, but none of our committee are dedicated D+I staff. We had to find a way to balance our purpose of fostering realistic, lasting change (which is often slow and methodical) with a desire to keep momentum and make sweeping changes to show progress. How could we ensure that we maintain the energy, continuously produce positive steps, and avoid backlash and backward moves by overwhelming the organization? Our solution is to focus on small wins.

We took our ideas and identified themes. This developed into five priority areas: (1) recruiting, (2) hiring, (3) equity, (4) communication, and (5) culture. We then prioritized the initiatives within each area. We assigned each item to a quarter of the year based on priority. Even so, we found that we still had too many tasks to maintain focus and forward movement.

Our committee meets monthly, so we made a shift to focus in on one item from each priority area for each month. We wanted to focus on small wins, so each goal is set to be achievable in a month or two. We worked to build support, accountability, and transparency into our process. For each goal, we document why it's important, how it will be tracked, who on the committee will "own" that item, and which sponsor within the company will assist and add accountability. Since we only work on five items at a time, we can build teams to work on each task so that the workload is distributed. Finally, we built in additional accountability and transparency because we report our quarterly progress to the CNUC management team, and to the entire company as part of our state-of-the-company calls.

Trying is important—we're still figuring this out. What has worked for us may not fit within your organization, but that shouldn't stop you from trying. What's important is that your organization finds what works for you and sticks to it. D+I, like so many aspects of our work, requires a continual improvement process. Regardless of the approach you take, ensure that you communicate within your organization. Employees may be looking for rapid, sweeping changes. In our experience, the navy seal expression, *Slow is smooth, and smooth is fast*, is a good description. In other words, don't rush. Take the time to check for consistency, think things through, notice, and listen. The result of your apparent slowness will provide an improved overall performance and changes that will stick.

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## Spotlighting Davey's Women in Utility

Statistically speaking, the utility arborist industry has been male dominated for as long as there have been rights-of-way (ROW) to manage. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 19.9% of people employed in the utility industry in 2019 were women. But in recent years, the numbers are shifting and more women are entering the utility workforce to experience the many benefits that this industry has to offer.

Davey is proud to employ many female team members in its utility division who uphold the company's commitment to safety, integrity, expertise, leadership, stewardship, and perseverance. These women influence the future of the utility industry as they build more expertise and passion for their work each day.

**Kay Handzus's** desire for new challenges has taken her across the eastern half of the U.S.—most recently to her position as a utility design specialist based out of Richfield, Ohio. In her current role, Handzus designs utility pole attachments and checks for National Electric Safety Code compliance.

**Erica Zellmann's** passion for helping her teammates grow and improve their skills is what makes her look forward to work each day. As an account manager for Davey's utility vegetation management (UVM) Pacific region, Zellmann provides support to project managers in her territories in the areas of client service, field safety, and employee engagement.

**Amy Murray's** day to day as a project developer in Davey's UVM mid-Atlantic region includes looking for new, creative solutions for her clients and collaborating with her internal team members. Her position allows her to use her experience and influence to help utilities identify ways that they can manage their ROW to serve energy operations, ecosystem opportunities, and social issues.

**Zoe Jacobson** recently started in the UVM field as an assistant supervisor. She wears many hats and does everything from tracking and following up on work orders, analyzing spreadsheets, and fielding customer requests. Her recent move into UVM has presented great

challenges for her problem-solving skills along with new and exciting learning opportunities.

**Amanda Burchett** took a chance when she switched gears from a GIS field technician to focus on make-ready engineering in 2017. Now, as a lead utility systems specialist for Davey's asset management division, Burchett uses her passion for learning and sharing knowledge to perform quality control on her team's projects and review the designs that her team creates while working closely with her clients to make sure projects are running smoothly.

These women prove that the utility industry has innumerable opportunities for anyone interested in getting into the field. Now more than ever, there is a space for women in utility to follow your passion, grow your skills, and have a voice in the future of the industry. Read more at [daveyutilitysolutions.com/empower](http://daveyutilitysolutions.com/empower).



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Companies that go above and beyond to support our mission will be recognized annually through our Partners in Excellence (PinE) Program.

Membership, sponsorship, advertising, active committee volunteerism, and many other means have been quantified and assigned a value, all adding up to equal a PinE Score.

All applications and supporting material of qualifying companies are reviewed and selected by the PinE Committee.

We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2020 PinE Award Recipients.

Your continued support of the Utility Arborist Association is greatly appreciated on many levels.



## 2020 PinE Award Recipients

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### SILVER AWARD



### BRONZE AWARD



## The Diversity of Learning

By Stephen Hilbert, Manager Technical Services, Asplundh Tree Expert LLC

Turnover is one of the most frequently discussed topics in the world of utility arboriculture. Some estimates by the UAA put first-year turnover at more than 70%. So, if I need to hire 10 new full-time employees to complete a contract, the statistics suggest that I will need to hire 34 people! Estimates place the cost of hiring a new employee

between \$2,000 - \$5,000. We all know that the cost of turnover is high, and this article is not aimed at how to reduce turnover specifically. However, if we understand how to teach and train individuals, we can make sure that they feel comfortable and behave safely on the job and, therefore, might want to stick around for a while. Furthermore, regardless of whether we hire 10 or 34 people, I can

guarantee you that not all of those men and women think or learn like I do.

When I started out in this industry, I worked for one of the leaders in safety at the time. But my first day of training involved watching a 15-minute video on how a chipper works. Then, I was ushered onto a crew for the day—which I was running late for because I was watching a video of a different model of a chipper than I would be operating. Thankfully, as a well-seasoned “tree guy” who worked summers with a family friend’s tree service, I knew a fair amount about chippers. In addition, I was familiar with how to be the receiver of brush on the ground during rigging operations, how to operate a rake and chainsaw, and was familiar with the general job flow, so I wasn’t a major nuisance to the crew.

Over the course of my tenure working in the field, I became responsible for helping train “green” new hires to the industry. At first, I was frustrated because I had to spend what I thought was way too much time going over the safe operation and functionality of equipment and tools. What I did not

realize at the time was that the main problem was not with the new hires but with the trainer (i.e., me). Over the course of time, I became more effective by learning to train each new hire in their unique “learning language.” I realized that I needed to alter

my own teaching style to ensure that the new hires completely understood the task or tool to keep themselves and others safe. I gradually learned to recognize the different learning styles of the new employees under my care.

### Models of Learning

There are many different models of learning that can be utilized while teaching.

Many of these models are geared for primary and secondary school students, but these can be adapted for adult learning theory. The Center for Disease Control has six professional development practices and one of these focuses on the diversity of learning. There are three domains of learning that impact adult learning theory: (1) cognitive learning (intellect), (2) affective learning (emotions), and (3) psychomotor or behavioral learning (basic motor skills). These represent the continuum of processes that begin with the simplest and end with the most complex. Most adults have mastered the lower order processes in each of these three domains. We can recall information (cognitive), pay attention (affective), and demonstrate a mechanical skill (psychomotor), such as tying a shoelace.

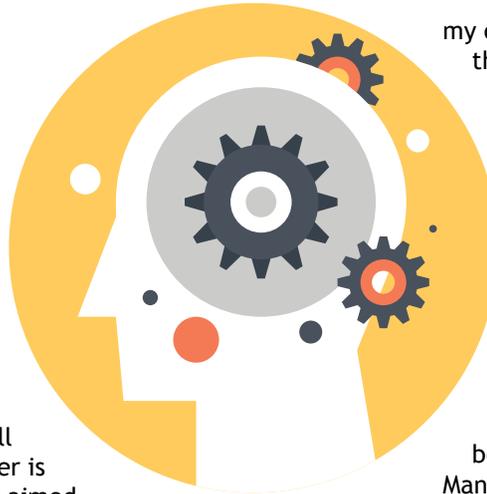
The challenge in reaching a group of adult learners involves engaging the participants on their level.

The ultimate goal is to challenge the learner to go beyond the basic processes and onto higher-order processes, such as troubleshooting, prioritization, and adaptation.

### Adult Learning Styles: Creating the Diverse Standard

One theory, by Walter Barbe and Michael Milone, is the VAK model, which suggests that every individual has a dominant learning style described as either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. A visual learner needs diagrams, illustrations, videos, slide-deck presentations, or whiteboards while listening to a lecture. The auditory learners need to hear the information through lectures, debates, spoken directions, talking through the problems, and reading aloud to understand written text. Kinesthetic or tactile learners need to *do*. They learn best being hands-on and can remember best by leveraging their desire for movement during a lesson. It is important to remember that most people use all three learning styles to some degree when digesting new information or performing a new task. This suggests that good trainers will utilize all three learning styles in their training, customizing as needed to meet both individual and group needs.

(Continued on page 30)





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## Diversity of Learning

(Continued from page 28)

When introducing a new tool or piece of equipment, whether to a new employee or a seasoned veteran, we need to recognize the diversity of learning styles. As the training progresses, there needs to be accountability and documentation that the employee can accomplish the task and that safety standards have been met.



Achieving this goal involves four steps to ensure that the adult learner has gone beyond the basic processes and into that higher level of learning. The four steps are as follows:

1. **Tell (auditory):** The fundamentals of the task, how it fits into the job, and key points to do each task correctly and safely. If there are safety labels or bulletins, trainees should read them first.
2. **Show (visual):** The reasons why tasks are done in a certain manner are explained. The trainee is positioned to see the task firsthand, and key points are stressed and repeated as needed until the trainee understands the task.
3. **Try Out (kinesthetic):** The trainee should instruct the trainer on the task to be performed completely and safely. The trainer should allow enough time in a non-distracting environment to be able to complete the first three steps.
4. **Check-in/Follow-up:** Once the trainee demonstrates proficiency and is allowed to work on their own, a follow-up process allows for the trainer to correct any risky habits that may have formed and ensures that their diverse learning style has been met.

This final step of the process is not necessarily attributed to the learning process and is often overlooked but is important to verify the success of learning.

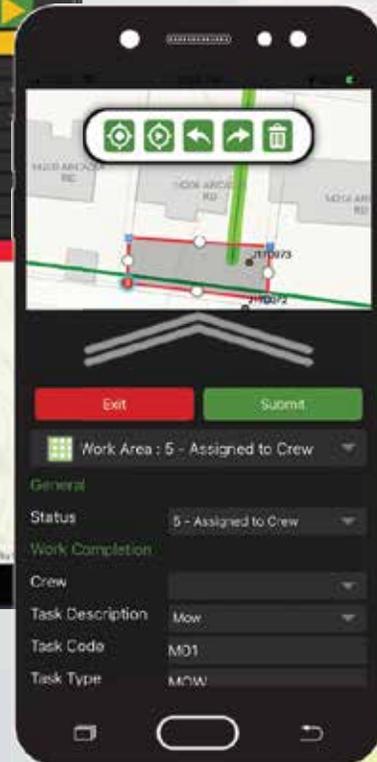
By understanding the diversity of learning, trainers can ensure that new hires are provided with the training they need to work safely and feel comfortable in their new position. This will help our industry attract and retain the workforce that will be the future of utility arboriculture.





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## Achieving Diversity in UVM

By Carly Harrower, Senior Operations Manager, ACRT Pacific

### The Diversity Challenges We're All Facing

Achieving greater diversity levels in the workforce has been a goal for many industries for years, but in utility vegetation management (UVM), it's proving to be a challenging one. There are a few critical reasons for this, but the two most significant are: (1) the types of roles required in different areas of the industry and (2) a lack of awareness of the industry itself.

When it comes to roles, we must break down the areas where people in our industry work. There are the utilities themselves—UVM companies such as ACRT and ACRT Pacific—and tree care contractors who execute vegetation management (VM) work plans. Utilities have improved diversity-related metrics thanks to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) requirements developed by investors. Private tree care companies have also attracted a diverse workforce because the profession typically does not require a background in formal education to obtain a position, enabling people to get to work faster.

These two segments of the industry leave UVM companies stuck in the middle with a few distinct challenges. First, the nature of our work requires thorough education, both upfront through training and through continuing education. Second, despite our ongoing efforts, very few people know that this industry is available to them. And because there is an awareness issue, attracting and retaining the best talent is extremely competitive.

### The Generational and Geographical Problems

Further complicating the matter is the fact that a new generation is entering the workforce, Generation Z, those born after 1996. According to Deloitte, Generation Z already constitutes more than a quarter of the population, and as of last year, it has become the most diverse



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generation in U.S. history. With the oldest Gen Zers around one year out of a four-year degree program, it has never been more essential to understand what this generation expects in the workplace—notably, 74% of Gen Zers want their jobs to have greater meaning apart from simply making money (*PR Newswire*, 2016)—and do what we can to communicate the importance of our industry in maintaining reliable energy and public safety.

The impact of geography in recruiting is another hurdle in UVM, as much of the talent in the industry—particularly those in the Generation Y (millennials)—are moving away from coastal areas in favor of western and southern cities where taxes, the cost of living, and housing costs are less expensive (Joiner, 2020). States like New York, California, Florida, the Carolinas, and others experience more weather- and fire-related emergencies, and it's in these areas that the need for skilled workers is greatest. And yet, while diverse talent is moving inland, much of it remains in urban areas.

### Efforts Made Now Are an Investment in Our Future

Outreach and education are not new concepts in the collective UVM recruiting toolkit, but now is the time to use them in a more focused and strategic manner. Remember, our goal is not only to attract additional talent to our industry but also to attract more diverse talent. A more diverse company is a more successful company. We can begin by conducting these efforts in urban areas where more diverse talent is already available and where the need for their skills and knowledge is greatest.

While your organization may already be conducting outreach and education in your local area, consider leveraging your connections—academic and professional—to start participating in new programs in coastal and urban communities. While traveling remains a concern, due to the ongoing pandemic, and public events may not yet be available, safely engaging with up-and-coming talent is a worthwhile effort. Talent acquisition and recruitment teams should consider conducting heavy research into





vocational and community programs—sponsoring, attending, and speaking at them as often as possible.

Consider leveraging digital platforms to share informative content showcasing existing diversity within your organization that shares those employees’ stories and experiences, while providing opportunities to learn more about available careers and benefit offerings. Whether you create your content as a video, a written piece, or some other format, use them in an organic fashion (such as on a company YouTube page or website) and in paid channels (such as promoting them via advertising on LinkedIn, Instagram, and other social media platforms). The latter will allow you to conduct greater targeting to reach specific geographies and demographics, thereby reaching a diverse talent base.

Now is also the time to dig deeper into academic outreach opportunities. College-level outreach is a common recruitment strategy in the UVM industry. Still, we have a distinct opportunity to start speaking to students sooner, such as during their final years in high school. Attending college fairs and other related educational events specific to high school students allows us to increase awareness of our industry and better serve the inbound college students who may be interested in urban forestry, arboriculture, botany, wildlife science, and other related fields of study.

By connecting with students before they enter college, we’re empowering them to choose schools that excel in these disciplines to help navigate their college career more seamlessly, rather than exploring majors for a few years only to switch to a UVM-related field and having to cram courses before graduating. This also gives students in college more time to explore industry-related programs, such as internships, and perhaps even gain relevant summer employment opportunities with municipalities.

**Remember: Diversity Isn’t an Accident**

We must be intentional about our efforts to attract more diverse talent and increase awareness of our industry. The future of our industry relies on people. With one of the most diverse generations entering the workforce, we have an amazing opportunity to attract a broader group of people with new perspectives, skill sets, and experiences. These individuals are looking for careers where they’ll be able to not only make a difference, but also enjoy a better work-life balance and overall quality of life. We can also speak to this generation’s passion for social and

environmental responsibility by highlighting our passion for our work environment and our focus on people—the foundation of our industry and our greatest asset.

I hope your organization will give careful consideration to how diverse talent is spoken to, recruited, and retained this year. This is an effort that requires participation industry wide in order to succeed, so I also encourage conversations between members of the industry, internally within your organizations, and within your professional groups.

The future of our industry—and in turn, the utilities and property owners we serve—relies on us. Let’s not let them down.

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## Florida Power and Light Interview on Digital Transformation

Clearion CEO Chris Kelly spoke with Dan Marsh from Florida Power and Light (FPL) about the digital transformation of their vegetation management (VM) program. We had to pare down the original interview, but for the full version and additional information, visit [www.fpl.com](http://www.fpl.com).

“We had some foremen on the team who had never owned or used a computer and became some of our best client users.”

**KELLY.** Dan, thanks for doing this with us. Can you say a little bit about how you got into VM, your history, your background in utility vegetation management (UVM), and what your current role is?

**MARSH.** I've received a BS from Penn State University in forestry and agriculture science. My first job was in the utility vegetation market, and I worked at several utilities across the country during my early years before ending up at FPL 21 years ago. Now, my title is VM Operations Leader.

**KELLY.** Could you tell us a little bit about the way transmission VM works? What are your work practices and processes? How do you deal with contractors?

**MARSH.** The transmission VM department has had professional vegetation managers as part of its program for about 20 years. Prior to that, we brought in some consultants to review the program, and one of the recommendations was to have a centrally organized program with specialists managing the regional areas.

One interesting aspect of our program is the internal VM certification program. All of our new folks go through a three- to six-month training with their peers and mentors where we ensure that they understand our standards and our program management philosophy. I think that's one of our key areas of expertise or best management practices (BMP)—that in-house training and certification.

**KELLY.** Before going live with your current system, what had the interaction with the crews been like? How did you give them work assignments and how did you communicate with them?

**MARSH.** We had a database that wasn't GIS based. We would go out and inventory the lines on paper maps and then log in to our work management system database at the office. It wasn't a mobile solution, and we handed the work to the general foreman supervisor of the tree vendor, who was tasked with having his crews execute that work. It was all paper based with a lot of inefficiencies with it.

**KELLY.** You just mentioned inefficiencies. Was there anything that was a real pain—a real driver that was the catalyst for FPL to decide to transition to an all-digital system?

**MARSH.** Well, the biggest one was back during the time the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) was starting to draft standards for transmission lines more than 200 kV. In one of the earlier violations, the tree crew was using a paper map with a hand-drawn work location. They trimmed the wrong tree and the tree that the utility had wanted pruned ultimately grew into the line and resulted in a NERC violation.

When we saw that happen, we realized that we needed to move forward with a GIS-based mobile platform, where the crew could actually drive up to the tree icon that showed on the screen and ensure that we had the work executed on the correct trees. I think that NERC incident scared us into building a GIS-based mobile work management system.



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**KELLY.** This was between 2008 and 2009 when you were making this decision. I remember at that time, leaders in the contractor community were thinking, *This is all great, but there's no way that our crew leaders are going to be comfortable with this.* And FPL was a really early mover. What was it like? Because if I recall correctly, you were actually buying hardware and providing transmission tree contractors with a turnkey software solution for them to use while they were on your system.

**MARSH.** That's correct. Back in those days, the utilities were very protective of network access—just as they are today—but maybe they were more fearful of someone seeing utility-owned data that wasn't located inside the firewall. Going outside of the firewall was not an option that we were given back in 2008 or 2009. We were pretty much required to provide the hardware to house the software. So, all of the laptops are FPL-owned. For a larger program, that might be a hard pill to swallow. But at the time, I think we had 54 machines on the system and it seemed to work pretty well. It was mostly a requirement from IT and the cybersecurity side of the company.

**KELLY.** Have you had any challenges or anything that your crew leaders have experienced with the technology over the years? What has the general experience been like? And what are some challenges that crew leaders might experience?

**MARSH.** We basically didn't give our vendors a choice: here's a laptop for you, here's your user credentials and password, here's some training on how to use the system. We had done so much upfront work on development. This thing was close to being a mature project on our first deployment. We had our workflows already identified from the old database and we mirrored that on the development of this work management system.

It went over very well with a little training.

We didn't have a lot of the problems that you run into these days with a minimum viable product (MVP) type. We developed our work management system to include the majority of our workflows. In fact, we had some foremen on the team who had never owned or used a computer and became some of our best client users.

**KELLY.** You gave a paper at the Right-of-Way Symposium around two years ago about how you use the technology in a storm response. Were there any unanticipated positive outcomes once your crews began utilizing the software?

**MARSH.** We got lucky by inventing this process. We just tried it and realized that we had pretty good connectivity in Florida in a helicopter. We started documenting our post-hurricane storm flights in our work management system, and on occasion, we would find something extremely critical—something that was ready to immediately take out one of our lines. We had the ability to synchronize those high-priority tickets from the helicopter so that crews could delegate those before the helicopter even landed for the next fueling. That's probably one of the best outcomes that came from using the system, without having thought of it. It's been just a wonderful way for us to manage a lot of tree conditions after a hurricane and get them resolved before having the liability issues to our grid.

One of the more challenging pieces of going digital is that you must have a way to manage the work—a way to understand the data and make sure that you execute the critical work and schedule the work properly throughout the year. If you go from paperwork to a GIS-based work management system, having a way to manage and understand the data could be a challenge when getting started with it.

**KELLY.** I think that if you're doing an inventory-based program—and even more so with LiDAR (light detection and ranging)—you can really drown in the data if it's not well organized. Now my final questions: do you have a wish list? In your perfect world, what are the one or two things that you would change or improve about the technology that the crew leaders are using?

**MARSH.** We would probably want to simplify some of the software applications that we're using and go to a web-based platform, which I think we're close to doing in some aspects of the program—just to get away from needing to license all the computers and do a lot of heavy lifting on updates and enhancements to the software. We'd like to move towards having a web-based program where that stuff can be done behind the scenes without disruption to the program from having to shut down the laptops for data updates and software enhancements. We're looking at that as probably one of our next steps.

And from a crew standpoint, I think we've given them a lot of what they needed: routing features—being able to see the maps, lines, and tree icons—and the ability to turn on the GPS antenna to ensure that they're pulling up to the correct tree, identify the work, simplify their needs, and minimize their mouse clicks to complete the work units. So, I think moving to a web-based program is our next step.

**KELLY.** That's a quite common thing that we've heard—the challenging overhead of managing the devices and these big data deployments onto the devices. There are vast improvements and efficiencies like cost savings in the administration of the hardware and software by moving it to this more modern platform.

Dan, I really appreciate it. Thank you.

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## Growing Inclusion in UVM

By Sarah Lilley, Supervisor of Research and Development, CNUC

Five years ago, I started my career in utility arboriculture as a consulting utility forester. Within the first two weeks, I called my supervisor and asked what the policy was for responding to harassment from the public while out patrolling. It was baffling to me why passersby felt the need to comment on the appearance of a utility worker wearing a hi-vis vest, boots, and hard hat. It was also off-putting when someone commented on how old they thought I was—either by bluntly posing the question, asking if I had just graduated high school, or joking that I was a trick-or-treater out early. And while rare, it was maddening when a homeowner would request to speak with a supervisor of a different gender.



Sarah Lilley

people find women working in utilities to be an oddity. While those comments were annoying and easily brushed off, there is still that nagging doubt that any of my successes may be due to favoritism because of my gender and how I look.

I know that my experiences are trivial compared to what others have endured. The scrutiny and psychological hurdles are greater for those whose ancestry is considered foreign or who may not identify with gender norms. How can an employee focus on producing quality work if the police are called on them, surrounding and inspecting their vehicle? How can an employee feel safe to work independently if they constantly hear news stories about people like themselves being killed for no reason? And how can an employee feel secure enough to

While all employees working with the public may occasionally come across someone with whom they just don't see eye to eye, some employees may not fit the general stereotype of a utility worker and face additional judgement for their gender or appearance. When

thinking about this article, it was difficult to get my thoughts on paper since I don't really consider myself to be a stereotype-buster, being a white, middle-income American with a decent college education. However, comments from working in the field made it clear that some

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apply for that promotion if the world at large is telling them that they don't belong?

While stories of negative encounters with the public are all too common, most of the time an employee's gender or appearance are not remarked upon, or when it does happen, it provides an opportunity for positive discussion. I've spoken with older women who are delighted that I can tell them what lines are on a utility pole, and I've had homeowners express relief when a female utility worker shows up on their property. And where I live in Southern California, it is hugely helpful to have coworkers who speak a variety of languages—just like the customers we serve.

The reality is that the utility workforce will become more diverse in the future, and it would be wise to act now to welcome that change. A continuously larger percentage of women are opting to work, more people are feeling

*“The reality is that the utility workforce will become more diverse in the future, and it would be wise to act now to welcome that change.”*

comfortable to identify as LGBTQ+, and the ethnic makeup of the country is becoming more diverse. You can start with the employees that you already have. Let them know that they are heard and supported for their differences and that their safety is paramount.

Finding qualified applicants is a seemingly constant battle in utility forestry. Capitalize on that by presenting career opportunities to more diverse groups and

welcoming applicants from all backgrounds. It's always beneficial to seek out training on harassment, discrimination, and implicit biases. These can aid employees at any level. Anyone can use a refresher.

To follow up on that training, take a few minutes for self-reflection to identify if you exhibit any discriminatory behavior or have biases to overcome. And finally, strive to have an open atmosphere of discussion at your workplace so that you can learn about the struggles that others may have experienced and learn how every employee's different background makes your company's culture richer and more resilient.

If that seems like a lot to think about, it is! And there are many more actions that you and your organization can take to foster diversity and inclusion in your workplace. But instead of being overwhelmed with all of the work to be done, embrace taking action in any way you can and see it as a path of continuous self-improvement. For all of the trauma that came out of 2020, it should be everyone's priority to be more inclusive, caring, and supportive of each other in the future. Hopefully over time, the scrutiny and inequalities based on people's differences will diminish and we can then direct our full attention on safety and doing the best work possible.



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**FirstEnergy**

FirstEnergy maintains approximately 300,000 miles of transmission and distribution line rights-of-way (ROW) across six

states, which is a significant undertaking. Forestry personnel are in the field every day to make sure FirstEnergy's quality tree care practices are being followed by contractors.

In addition to protecting pollinators, FirstEnergy's vegetation management (VM) group provides various services—all of which are performed by qualified line-clearance forestry contractors in accordance with national standards:

**Tree Trimming and Land Clearing.** Our team inspects vegetation near power lines to ensure that trees are pruned in a manner which helps preserve the health of the tree and maintains proper clearances around electrical equipment. We expect to trim more than two-million trees along approximately 32,000 miles of power lines in 2021. The group also works with FirstEnergy Transmission to help clear land for "Energizing the Future" projects.

**Herbicide Application.** We coordinate application of herbicides with certified contractors to maintain vegetation in transmission line corridors. FirstEnergy's herbicide program follows best management practices (BMP) established by the UAA, using all aspects of the closed chain of custody process for applying herbicides.

**Line Inspection and Investigations.** Our team identifies potential vegetation issues (e.g., an off-ROW tree is leaning toward a power line) by using helicopters equipped with Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) artificial intelligence technology and a "boots-on-the-ground" approach, where company foresters walk along transmission line corridors.

**Storm Response.** We work with contractor crews to clear fallen trees from roads and remove limbs from damaged electrical equipment after severe weather strikes. These efforts help to ensure that job sites are safe for line crews involved in repair work.

FirstEnergy's core value of social responsibility ensures that employees and contractors prioritize environmental stewardship as the BMP.

## Removing Barriers: Facilitating Access to Opportunities for Some of the Most Productive Members of Our Industry

By Jesus Vetencourt, VP of  
Canadian Operations, Wright  
Canada Holdings Ltd.

Wright Canada Holdings Ltd. is  
a subsidiary company to Wright  
Service Corporation



When I was offered the opportunity to write this article, my first thought was, *An article? How about a book?* I'm a native Spanish speaker who immigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela. My first job in this industry was a groundworker in an aerial lift crew in Omaha, Nebraska. I could barely say a few words in English on my first day at work, so an article is certainly not enough real estate to write about my experience in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry. My second thought was, *I should use this as an opportunity to trigger action rather than just share my experiences.*

With that second thought in mind, I would like to offer you some reflections based on my experience, hoping they will move you to take action and help remove what I consider to be the most challenging barrier for some of our fellow industry members' career advancements.

I estimate that 40% or more of the total members of our industry in the U.S. are first- or second-generation immigrants, primarily native Spanish speakers from Mexico and Central

America. Within this group, a marked majority struggle with what we sometimes call the "language barrier"—or in plain terms—the lack of English language skills. In most cases, language barriers hinder an employee's efforts to build relationships that can lead to career development and advancement. It is very difficult to gain access to additional opportunities if you can't communicate well with your supervisor or clients. **I think about this group of people as having a tremendous impact in our industry, but an almost muted voice.**

So, how do we tackle this barrier? A thought that may help you approach this issue from a different angle to trigger action within your organization, vendor, client, or partner community: I think employers *own* the language barrier. If you start thinking about the lack of English language skills in the same way that you do with any other gap in an

employee's skillset, the only logical conclusion is to invest in training, tools, or systems to bridge the gap. Of the Wright Service Corporation's family of companies, Wright Tree Service has the largest percentage of native Spanish speakers.

There are numerous actions that we are taking to remove this barrier. Comprised of employees from across our organization, the Spanish program committee works to provide high-quality Spanish translations for employees who struggle with English language skills, ranging from our safety program and operating procedures to group benefits memos. We've also made sure that employee resources—like our clothing and merchandise store—are available in Spanish. It is simple; if these employees have access to all relevant information in a format that they can understand, you are already helping them get into position for opportunities and advancement and, more importantly, you are leveling the field. We currently have more than 400 LinkedIn Learning courses available in Spanish through our learning management system and we're always expanding.

Another initiative is encouraging native English speakers to learn Spanish. For example, every team member of the Wright Tree Service safety department is currently enrolled in a program to learn Spanish language skills. The aim is for them to improve their communication with their fellow Spanish-speaking coworkers.

At this point, you may be wondering, *How about learning English?* And to that I say, absolutely—that's ultimately the overarching goal. To that

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## Removing Barriers

*(Continued from page 42)*

end, there are several options, from partnerships with community colleges and non-profits to in-house programs that can help our fellow coworkers build their English language skills. I suggest that initiatives which aim to bridge the communication gap in both directions yield the best results. From my experience, one thing that motivated me to work hard to learn English was seeing my employer doing their part by allowing me access to information with Spanish translations. Once I gained access to the information and educated myself enough, reading or discussing the information in English became progressively easier. It is a great formula that I challenge you to pilot.

Another area often overlooked when implementing some of these initiatives and creating an inclusive environment is access to the rich pool of additional talent and skills available within this community. Throughout my career, I have met people who struggled to communicate in English who had degrees, certificates, experience in other trades, entrepreneurship experience, and excellent leadership skills who could have been leveraged by bridging the gap. I encourage you to look beyond the language barrier and avoid equating capacity or intelligence with someone's ability to communicate in English.

At the start of my career, I was very fortunate to come across some fantastic people at Wright Tree Service who looked beyond my broken English and provided me with opportunities to show my potential, even if it required additional effort on their part. I will always be thankful to them. Now, in my current role, I am happy to be able to work on initiatives that help other employees have better access to trainings and opportunities.

In closing, some of you may need to get outside of your comfort zone or set aside preconceived notions about this matter in order to contribute or drive these type of actions, especially in the current social climate. I believe that you will quickly realize that it is the right thing to do for your business and fellow industry colleagues.



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*Ray Crump*

### **Ray Crump: Site Safety Project Manager**

North American Training Solutions (NATS) is pleased to announce the promotion of Ray Crump to Site Safety Project Manager. This new role is in addition to Crump's work as a Lead Safety Professional and Assistant Instructor. In his roles, Crump works with NATS clients in the forestry, arboriculture, power utility, oil and gas, as well as government and public sector industries to ensure that their crews and job sites are using safe practices so that at the end of the day, everyone returns home safely to their friends and families.

Crump joined NATS in 2018 after attending our Train the Trainer course and volunteering to help with other local courses. His first deployment as a member of the NATS team was onboarding and conducting competency assessments on more than 1,100 utility contract workers in California. In Crump's new role, he enjoys how it evolves and changes with the clients' needs and that it is an in-the-field position.

Prior to joining NATS, Crump worked as a contract climber. He takes on his new role with several professional certifications, including Certified Arborist and Consulting Utility Forester Safety Professional (CUFSP). Crump recently became an OSHA-Authorized General Industry Outreach Trainer, too. He earned his associate degrees in horticulture (Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute) and bioenvironmental engineering (Community College of the Air Force). Crump is a Red Cross Basic Life Support (BLS) and CPR Instructor and currently serves in the U.S. Air Force Reserves—previously on active duty—for which he is an occupational health technician and emergency responder.

When asked what Crump enjoys most about his work with NATS, he said that in addition to exchanging best practices and learning tricks from the crews with whom he works, "I love to be the change I want to see."



## A Steadfast Path: My Urban Forestry and USDA Forest Service Journey

Reprinted with permission from *City Trees*, the magazine of the Society of Municipal Arborists ([urban-forestry.com](http://urban-forestry.com)).

By *Beattra Wilson*, Forest Service Assistant Director of Cooperative Forestry and National Lead for Urban and Community Forestry

Photos courtesy of *Beattra Wilson*



*Beattra Wilson opened the 2018 Partners in Community Forestry Conference in Irvine, California with her plenary presentation.*

*Wilson began her career with the USDA Forest Service in 2002 in Atlanta as an urban forestry trainee; she is now the Forest Service Assistant Director of Cooperative Forestry and National Lead for Urban and Community Forestry. We asked Beattra to share some of her educational and career trajectory and what excites her about her work. Here she is in her own words.*

I grew up surrounded by pine forests in a small town in Louisiana called Oakdale. I was introduced to agriculture education and career opportunities beginning in fourth grade through my involvement with 4-H. I competed at the parish and statewide fairs in the 4-H Sew with Cotton and Public Speaking contests. Those 4-H experiences helped

propel me to hold leadership roles in high school. I also had a pivotal experience at a summer agricultural camp at Southern University and A&M College, a historically black college and university (HBCU) system, where I learned in depth about urban forestry and other agriculture professions. (This summer agriculture institute continues to serve 40-50 students each summer, and the Forest Service is a supporting partner).

As I was looking into college degree programs, based on my test scores and GPA I was recruited by two colleges for urban forestry and agriculture economics and five colleges for engineering. Ultimately, I chose to study urban forestry because it seemed like a perfect merger of my deep connection to agriculture along

with my desire to have a career that afforded me the opportunity to live in a big city.

I decided to do go to Southern University and A&M College to study urban forestry for several reasons. I was interested in a career path into the U.S. Forest Service, which worked with Southern University and A&M College to create the nation's first bachelor's degree in urban forestry and continues to partner closely with that institution and program, offering financial, technical, and career development assistance. I could see myself represented in the teaching staff, administration, and student body—and that was very appealing to me, as it gave me a sense

*(Continued on page 46)*



Urban forestry is one of the professions BAYOU Program students can explore, as these students did during the 2013 iteration of this summer program at Southern University in Baton Rouge.

of belonging. Plus, Baton Rouge, where Southern University is located, was close to home.

I'm a first-generation college graduate in my family and it was always a priority of mine to go to college on a scholarship so I could graduate without a major financial burden. The U.S. Forest Service partnership with the Southern University Urban Forestry Degree Program meant that I could go to college on scholarship and know that there was a network of support, internships, and the right academics to help me enter the organization upon graduation. So you can imagine how meaningful it is for me to come full circle to be in a position to assist current and future generations of urban forestry students at Southern

*"The pandemic and social justice challenges of 2020 give us a chance to focus on impact beyond implementation. It calls for us to listen to and learn from vulnerable communities more than ever, and to stretch urban forestry practitioners' program administration skills and abilities toward measurable impact."*

through the ongoing partnership with the Forest Service.

I'm excited to have landed where I can operationalize my urban forestry credentials but also have the opportunity to lead a program that I have enjoyed being a part of for the past 11 years. This is a moment where leadership is needed to ensure that urban forestry and urban forests serve communities equitably. The pandemic and social justice challenges of 2020 give us a chance to focus on impact beyond

implementation. It calls for us to listen to and learn from vulnerable communities more than ever, and to stretch urban forestry practitioners' program administration skills and abilities toward measurable impact.





While in college at Southern, I interned every summer for the Forest Service. After graduation I became an urban forestry trainee in the Southern Region office in Atlanta; that was an exciting time! It amounted to everything I wanted to do as an urban forestry professional, from program administration and performance to community engagement. The public service side is where I fit in then and now, ensuring that the Forest Service's resources are available for communities to improve the conditions of their urban forests.

After two years in that position, I worked out of the Atlanta office as a budget coordinator for State and Private Forestry in the Southern Region. While working in that position, I went to school at night to earn my Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Kennesaw University. Having an undergraduate degree in urban forestry gave me the confidence to work in natural resources, while pursuing the MPA trained me in the budget management and policy side of things. I knew this training would help me as I advanced in my career, especially as I moved into national-level roles managing and implementing a public program.

In the last couple of semesters, my MPA program merged with Kennesaw's MBA program, which ended up expanding my horizons even further. I got to see the point of view of the for-profit side around conservation, and in that year we were frequently asked to take positions and defend them, which was invaluable training that I've used through my career.

In 2007, I moved to Washington, D.C. to work as an analyst in fire and aviation management for the Forest Service, coordinating Government Accountability Office audits and national fire reviews. That was a step out of urban forestry, but very worthwhile, as the Forest Service is highly respected for its work on fire and aviation, among many other areas. I was able to travel quite a bit to see the agency's work on wildfire preparation and response and on aviation training and safety—including aviation for fighting wildfires—which I found fascinating. It provided me with a more advanced lens onto the Forest Service's abilities and highly respected role in the conservation community. *(Continued on page 48)*



Crystal  
Franciosi

## Going the Extra Mile: Crystal Franciosi

It's no surprise that ACRT Consulting Utility Forester (CUF) Crystal Franciosi recently received an organizational G.E.M. (Going the Extra Mile) Award; she lives out everything that the award stands for every day.

Assigned to one of our northeastern utility customers, Franciosi has been praised by her operations manager and the vegetation management (VM) leader at the utility for going above and beyond expectations on multiple occasions.

On a daily basis, Franciosi performs a wide range of utility vegetation management (UVM) duties, such as gaining property owner consent for tree work, managing hazard tree removals, representing the utility at town meetings, managing outages, handling storm response, and more. She is the company arborist covering a significant portion of the utility territory where she is responsible for all tree work, resolving customer complaints, and interacting with contractor crews, officials, and property owners.

Franciosi understands that success for the utility and its customers means going beyond day-to-day responsibilities. She has successfully uncovered various system issues, such as pole top construction, wire-related problems, and various safety issues—even on other utility systems.

In one instance, she noticed a private tree company crew member working on a tree near live wires. The crew member was not wearing any personal protective equipment (PPE) and had not received any electrical hazard training. Despite him wanting to continue working, Franciosi succeeded in getting him out of the tree, thereby preventing the possibility of serious injury.

We are proud of her work to strengthen our customer's VM program; but more importantly, we're proud of her relentless commitment to safety at all times and for everyone involved.

Learn more about ACRT and our safety philosophy at [acrt.com](http://acrt.com).



*The summer Beginning Agricultural Youth Opportunities Unlimited (BAYOU) Program at Southern University provides high school students an immersion in career opportunities in agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and related disciplines.*

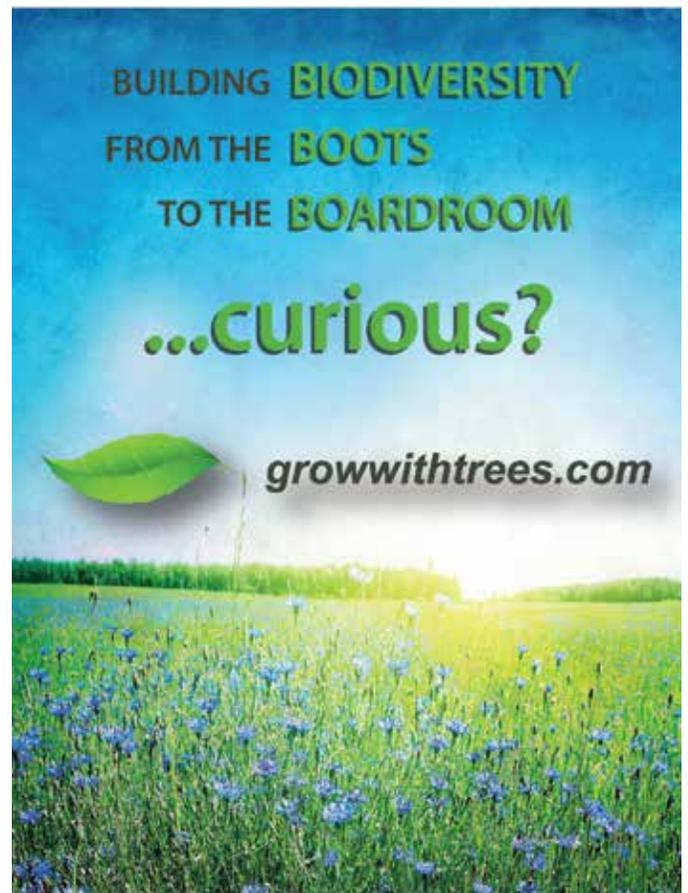
Some Society of Municipal Arborist (SMA) members met me at the Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) in 2019 and 2020, themed as Diversity in MFI. I led visioning and requested funding for those two iterations of this pilot project, in collaboration with SMA—who had expressed interest in creating more diversity within MFI—and with Southern University and A&M College. The effort provided scholarships to urban forestry professionals who consider themselves part of a minority population.

Diversity in MFI was one way I have been able to utilize the space and access I've had in managing a national program to explore the gaps in delivering urban forestry services equitably and meeting the needs of communities that have been traditionally underserved. One of those needs is around workforce development and retention.

The opportunity was there for us to think through not just the recruitment potential for future urban forestry professionals through internships, student assistantships, and hiring initiatives. It was a chance for us to pause and consider the existing pool of talented, credentialed professionals who wanted urban forestry leadership training but had not yet received the opportunity. I had observed dozens of graduates of the urban forestry program at

Southern that I attended—those who came before or after me, or were my classmates—leave the field of urban forestry for lack of training and advancement possibilities.

Diversity in MFI was a 50-50 partnership of SMA and Southern University that placed participants into what our urban forestry industry upholds as a premier municipal forestry leadership development institute to serve two





*Beatra Wilson speaking to MFI participants in 2017 at the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Conference Center.*

purposes. The first was to respond to the false assumption that there isn't diverse talent to tap into for municipal forestry leadership, and the second was to re-engage those who may have left the field and show them that there is space for them in this industry. Partnership with Southern made total sense because it has the most diverse alumni roster of urban national resource professionals in the country. The application process allowed us

to identify additional degree programs and pipelines of urban forestry and urban natural resource professionals.

The Forest Service has long partnered with SMA to ensure that the MFI curriculum, cohort, and cadres are ready for the next generation of urban foresters. Diversity in MFI was a highly successful two-year pilot program that trained participants with leadership skills but as important, established, and expanded networks that will directly aid in career advancement and a critical sense of belonging in the field of urban forestry. I believe that with those networks in place, MFI will organically be more diverse going forward and become a model for other forestry leadership development programs.

At a time when innovation and inclusion are seen as one and the same—that is to say, that when all lived experiences are brought to the table, the level of innovation will be higher—Diversity in MFI fulfilled an important role, and the communities these leaders serve will benefit.

You asked me what my biggest hope is for the Forest Service's role in urban forestry in the U.S. My hope is that urban and community forestry services will be delivered equitably and that we stretch our resources and authorities to help communities meet the most basic and human-felt needs to live healthy lives. In 2020,

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## ECI Innovation Promotes Inclusion and Diversity

ECI's most valuable asset is our employees. Having a *diverse* workforce is essential in solving today's complex utility challenges. As the utility industry continues to promote and encourage diversity in the workforce, ECI is leveraging innovation to further support this important duty.

We call this innovation Digital Corridor Management (DCM)—a technology-enabled service which uses proven technology to improve safety, reliability, and costs. Virtual inspectors take advantage of the power of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) in conjunction with high-resolution imagery

to identify much of the work from the comfort of their office, while still relying on our field experts for validating hard-to-see areas, tree marking, and direct property owner contacts.

DCM programs have created an opportunity for ECI to reach a more diverse talent pool—disabled veterans, women, stay-at-home parents,

and other minorities—by overcoming geographical and physical limitations. One of ECI's key principles is to foster an environment of empowerment, inclusion, and respect. By implementing new combinations of innovative technologies and recruiting untapped talent for our workforce, we continue our vision to safely deliver sustainable solutions that are innovative by nature.



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*DCM uses LiDAR and high-resolution imagery to easily identify work from the office.*



*Beattra Wilson (fifth from left) with instructors and students in the 2019 class of the 1890 HBCU Environmental Justice Academy at the White House HBCU Conference. Wilson said, "Ten new environmental justice leaders presented amazing research and displayed passion and creativity ... truly inspiring!"*

the pandemic and climate change impacts have amplified disparities in urban heat islands and in canopy cover and showed how those gaps have over time increased the vulnerability of everyone, but in some communities more than others. As any good leader in 2021 would, I want to see an emphasis on access and equity.

In the meantime, I am also a mother of two—a kindergartner and a fourth grader who are doing virtual learning 100% of the time; I'm working from home 100% of the time; and sometimes a nerf ball flies through my office. One day, I was on a video call with partners

and my daughter yelled down the hall that she couldn't find the Zoom passcode to get into virtual P.E. class. I believe we are all doing our best and it's good to be transparent about the challenges of juggling these new, global realities at home. For me, home is in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. with my family.

Before signing off, I want to recognize the amazing team of urban forestry professionals who I've worked with for several years now. I have the honor and privilege of moving into a different role but we still function as a team. As I've said in past presentations, together, we are "making shift happen."

*At the SMA Conference in Cleveland awards ceremony in 2019, outgoing SMA President Keith Cline honored Wilson with a President's Award of Appreciation. He said, "As a colleague, Beattra Wilson has offered me wise counsel and an ever-ready ear for over 15 years. Most recently, she has been a crucial partner in the creation of Diversity in MFI, continuing her career-long commitment to growing leaders and to promoting equity and diversity in our profession."*





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