

IndustryVoice

Arbor Upkeep Requires Expert Pruning



BY JEFF MARIOLA

'Time spent in nature directly contributes to mental and physical health and well-being. We need to sustain our cities' vital green spaces by ensuring that sufficient budget and expertise is allocated so that future tragedies can be averted.'

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“If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?”

This proverb has little relevance with our country's increasingly popular tree-rich public parks, which are visited by tens of millions of people each year. On June 26, with nary a cloud in the sky, a falling tree branch fell near Central Park's sea lion exhibit in New York City and took the life of a six-month-old baby girl. This tragic accident must act as a national wake-up call to our urban park planners to ensure enough arborists are available to monitor and service trees in high-traffic areas. Ensuring that trees are properly maintained requires that enough certified arborists, who have passed an exam given by the International Society of Arboriculture, are in place to remove dead or potentially hazardous limbs.

Our country's public parks serve as green lifelines for city dwellers who crave the restorative time that only nature can bring. As the North American leader of the world's top plantscaping company, I recognize the importance of creating and sustaining vital green spaces that provide a safe and recuperative haven to the public.

Pruning large trees can be dangerous work that demands the hiring of professional arborists. Arborists determine what type of pruning is necessary to improve the health, safety and appearance of trees. Central Park, which was designated a National Historic Landmark, is visited by more than 25 million visitors each year, and features hundreds of tree varieties within the 770 acres of city-owned land.

Central Park, managed by the Central Park Conservancy under contract with the City of New York, has a tree budget of over \$600,000. This relatively modest budget needs to be expertly managed. It requires significant oversight to ensure that enough arborists and crew are on task each and every day with particular concentration at the

park's most highly trafficked areas, such as its entrances, zoo and restaurant areas. Last year, a man was killed when a branch covered with snow hit him as he was walking on Central Park's Literary Walk, and a young man suffered brain and spinal damage from a rotted branch that fell off an oak tree near the West 63rd Street entrance. Clearly, Central Park's tree maintenance program needs to allocate more of their expert horticultural resources at their busiest areas.

In reaction to this latest tragedy, Geoffrey Croft, president of the NYC Park Advocates, a watchdog group, said, "We cannot have the public getting killed in the park." I echo his sentiments, as trees should never become weapons of destruction. Woody Allen once said, "As the poet said, 'Only God can make a tree'—probably because it's so hard to figure out how to get the bark on." Fortunately, for professional arborists worldwide, we never have to figure out how to get the bark back on a tree, but we do need to ensure that people are not injured or killed by falling branches.

Over 80 years ago, Richard Leiber, secretary of the Indiana Board of Forestry, said, "A monument of trees in a well-ordered grove is human and humane. It speaks the language of free men. It is full of solace and hope to the bereaved. As a living and a breathing thing, it speaks of victory over death. It is expressive of thanks and devotion by the people to its heroes dead and living." Let's honor our country's monument of trees by ensuring that they are respectfully maintained.

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