

# COLLABORATING

## WITH VOLUNTEERS, SCHOOLS AND UTILITIES

### CHAPTER SIX



Photo courtesy, TreeUtah

**Volunteers and other partners greatly expand the potential for good ideas and getting the job done, but only if there is an investment in training and assistance.**

**I**n our volunteer urban forester training class in San Jose, California, students are typically amazed to learn that the trees in our cities are suffering. As their awareness increases, they begin to take notice, coming to class with such comments as, ‘How could they plant that tree there?’ ‘Why haven’t those trees been pruned?’ ‘Why hasn’t that tree been replaced?’ These questions confront the wide-eyed assumption that government always plants the right trees in the right places and has the resources to care for them adequately.

“While the students are disheartened to learn that the ‘experts’ can’t always come through, they soon develop a strong sense of the importance regarding their role as tree ambassadors. They realize that they are very much needed and that they – even as individuals – can make a tremendous impact. The job of caring for the urban forest is bigger than any one agency can handle and therefore requires help from everyone.”

— Rhonda Berry  
*Proceedings of the Sixth National Urban Forestry Conference*

## Working With Volunteers

Sustainable urban forestry requires far more than a single department or organization responsible for a community's trees. It requires a partnership of all interested people, young and old, professional and nonprofessional. Volunteers fill this need. Forest Service researcher Lynne Westphal and urban forester Gina Childs suggest the benefits of using volunteers include:

- **Skills that may not be on staff.** Volunteers typically include a cross section of the community – lawyers, landscapers, writers, artists, business people, teachers and many others. Their talents and contacts can add depth and power to any forestry program.
- **New ideas.** An array of vocational and cultural backgrounds is sure to bring ideas. Some may not be workable, but others can lead to great new projects or the success of old ones.

- **Public support.** Volunteers can serve as a conduit between urban foresters and their constituents. They can speak up for funding, defend management decisions, challenge politicians or special interests and serve as a link with broad segments of the community.

- **Extra hands, more work.** Whether it is pruning young trees, planting, or staffing exhibits and educational programs, volunteers expand the urban forestry work force. More can be accomplished, benefiting the tree resource, citizens of the community, and the volunteers themselves.

### What Makes Them Tick?

The first step toward working effectively with volunteers is to understand why they volunteer.

If there is a single trait shared by all volunteers, it is that they care about trees. It is this spirit of concern and a willingness to back it up with time and action that makes these individuals the keystone

## Can Volunteers Do It All?

The answer, of course, is 'no!' While volunteers can supplement a professional work force, by no means should they be expected to replace it or be a substitute for solid financial support at the municipal level.

### **Volunteers are especially suited for...**

- ✓ Planting trees
- ✓ Watering trees
- ✓ Mulching
- ✓ Stake removal
- ✓ Distributing door hangers or other literature
- ✓ Sponsoring yard beautification contests
- ✓ Staffing fair booths
- ✓ Conducting fund raising events
- ✓ Monitoring, reporting and preventing vandalism
- ✓ Advocating ordinance or planning and zoning reform
- ✓ Cleaning tree wells

### **Professionals are best at...**

- ✓ Selecting and ordering trees
- ✓ Fertilizing
- ✓ Aerating
- ✓ Staking recommendations, bracing, cabling
- ✓ Preparing or reviewing educational content
- ✓ Designing urban wildlife habitat and recommending right-of-way restrictions
- ✓ Conducting workshops and training
- ✓ Developing budgets
- ✓ Controlling insects and diseases; enforcing ordinances
- ✓ Advising on ordinance or planning and zoning provisions
- ✓ Removing tree grates

of sustainable urban forestry. Beyond this, however, there are more subtle reasons that people volunteer. Here are six common reasons and what leaders can do to best use those motivations to both satisfy the volunteer and benefit the urban forestry program.

### **Recognition**

Volunteers who are motivated by the need for public recognition are seeking status or prestige through their work with trees or the organization behind it. These folks do well at projects that have high visibility and public relations value. They are enthusiastic about working with the media and being part of the decision-making core of the organization. Suggested assignments:

- Planning and helping to conduct ceremonial tree plantings
- Serving in a leadership role for Arbor Day
- Being on a TV or radio talk show
- Representing the group at Tree City USA award events
- Authoring bylined articles for the local newspaper
- Serving as liaison with elected officials or corporate officers

### **Altruism/Public Duty**

The general good of the community is the primary concern of these volunteers. They tend to be idealistic and place a high premium on fairness, just decisions, and learning. They are also champions of involving all segments of the community in projects, they deal well with conflicting values, and they have the patience to learn about government operations. Suggested assignments:

- Planning teams of all kinds
- Serving on tree boards, working with planning and zoning, or serving in liaison positions
- Developing or improving tree ordinances
- Conducting surveys to define community desires, goals, etc.
- Working with schools
- Promoting urban forestry to other groups



*Some volunteers simply enjoy working with others and making new friends.*

### **Affiliation**

These individuals have a need for social interaction. They simply enjoy working with others and making new friends. They like the support of others and do much better in group work than on solo assignments. Suggested assignments:

- Participating in tree planting or tree care projects
- Planning and conducting social events
- Conducting workshops
- Selling things like t-shirts, memberships, etc.
- Being in charge of volunteer recognition or awards events
- Serving as liaison with partner organizations

### **Achievement**

Individuals motivated by the need to achieve usually seek excellence in what they do. They are likely to be innovative and more competitive than others. They need challenging tasks, constant feedback on performance, and opportunities to learn and do new things. Suggested assignments:

- Providing leadership in inventory or hazard tree projects
- Serving as liaison with utilities or developers in resolving issues of aesthetics
- Monitoring insect/disease problems
- Monitoring survival of trees after planting projects
- Attendance at conferences and training sessions

## Power

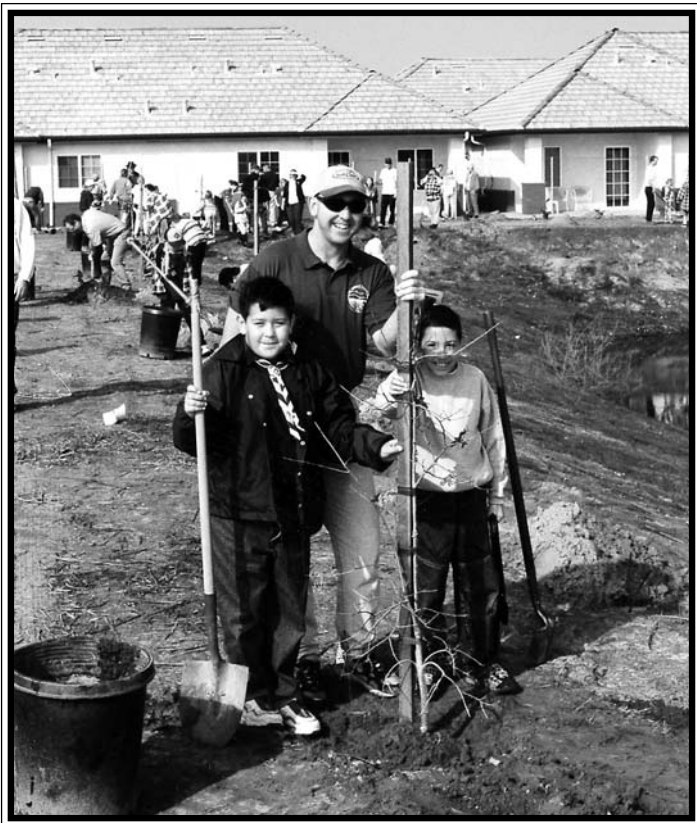
These volunteers have a need to influence others, hold authority, and be involved in decisions. They like being supervisors and dealing directly with other people, and they like being involved in planning and decision-making. Suggested assignments:

- Serving as committee chair
- Serving on boards that have authority
- Leading tree planting or pruning teams
- Developing position or policy statements
- Helping to enforce ordinance provisions
- Serving as liaison with political figures or company officials

## Preservation

Environmental responsibility is the main motivation of these folks. They worry about changes that negatively affect the environment and they try to influence others to 'do the right thing.' Suggested assignments:

- Serving as liaison with developers, the parks commission and other units of government or the private sector that can have an impact on trees



*Work with existing groups like scouts when possible.*

- Developing educational materials and programs
- Speaking at service clubs or similar meetings
- Helping with any kind of tree or wildlife habitat projects
- Managing natural areas
- Fund raising

## Five Steps to Successful Volunteer Management

Although volunteers are a godsend to any urban forestry program, they do not come without cost. That is, an investment is needed, both in time and funds to make volunteer collaboration a positive, productive experience.

*It was a crisp, cloudless autumn day – the perfect Saturday morning to launch our community's first street tree inventory. Ten volunteers had showed up at my earlier training session, so I thought all was in order. Imagine my surprise when 50 people showed up that morning, ranging from scouts to the elderly! ...The day turned into a nightmare and, not surprisingly, only 3 to 5 people showed up on subsequent weekends.*

*That experience taught me a valuable lesson that I put into practice the second time around – be prepared.*

— Mike Bowman  
City Forester  
Lewiston, Idaho

There are five important steps to working well with volunteers:

- 1. Work with existing volunteer groups when possible** instead of creating yet another organization. Or, if you are involved in the leadership of a group, aggressively recruit members. Of course, be open to all who are interested, but also personally ask people to join who you know would add strength, balance, diversity and the kind of talent needed to accomplish your goals.



**2. Provide direction.** Most volunteers want guidance and do not want their time wasted. Use an agenda at meetings, assign specific, do-able tasks complete with deadlines and a clear idea about the expected outcome or product. For specific positions (secretary, treasurer, board member, crew leader, etc.), develop job descriptions just like those for paid positions.

**3. Provide orientation and training.**

Orientation can be a presentation or at least a manual. The manual should include: the history, mission and goals of your organization; policies; a directory of who's who; and basic information about tree care and urban forestry. A loose-leaf notebook works well for this purpose.

**4. Supervise.** An important part of successful volunteer management is trust and delegation of duties. Train and explain, then step back and let the volunteers do their jobs. However, provide helpful feedback as needed, and plenty of positive reinforcement.

**5. Thank!** Virtually everyone likes to be recognized for the good works they perform, especially volunteers. Often this is the only 'pay' they receive. Express appreciation often and sincerely, including written notes, formal letters, and occasional plaques or other tokens of appreciation. Also make sure that this sometimes finds its way into newsletters and local media.

## Working With Schools

If it is work you want done, working with school groups is not usually the best approach. If



*When working with children, remember that they thrive with 'hands-on' activities.*

education is your mission, there is no better long-term potential for success than working with school children. For those who do not regularly work with children, the most common mistake or apprehension is in how to match the appropriate activities with the various age levels. To help with this, please refer to the chart on page 43.

When working with children, remember that they thrive with 'hands-on' activities and they love surprises. "Discovery" is often the term used to describe this kind of education. Working with teachers, however, is a different story. They do not want to be surprised!

## Resource Kit For Volunteers Available

A helpful kit at nominal cost is available to help successfully launch a volunteer tree-planting project or Arbor Day celebration. *The Tree Planting Resource Kit for Volunteers* is ideal for anyone – regardless of level of experience – who is planning to work with trees and volunteers. The kit contains a leadership guide, suggested events and projects, tips for implementing projects, how to work productively with volunteers, and other helpful information. It also includes a *Celebrate Arbor Day* guidebook and a motivational training video. Contact The National Arbor Day Foundation for purchasing information.



Teachers are the key to collaboration with school groups. Involve them in your plans from the very start (at the start of the school year is best), and if they agree to let you work with their classes, work with them closely. Here is some information you should provide the teacher or that you should obtain from him or her in your first conversations:

- Explain what your group is all about and who will be involved in the teaching activity.

- Explain what you expect the children to learn. The best way to express this is through ‘instructional objectives,’ e.g. “the student will be able to list 3 things that roots must have in order for a tree to live a healthy life.”

- List what tasks or activities you plan. Be sure to make allowances for children with various handicaps (inquire about this early in your planning).

## Educating Kids About Trees – How to Match Age With Activities

Teaching young people about trees and urban forestry cannot be simply a watered down version of material prepared for adults. It requires a fundamentally different approach, and depends very much on the age and interests of the group. Below are some guidelines that may help, borrowed from *Tree City USA Bulletin No. 42: Working With Children*.

### At ages 4 & 5:

Kids love to . . . touch, taste, smell, hear, and experience things for themselves; use their rich imaginations; learn by doing; participate in dramatic play, including inventing games; tell stories; sing; collect things; draw pictures.

and are also learning to . . . share with others and control inner selves (including their love to talk!); ask lots of questions; sort and classify; work with concepts such as numbers, sizes, textures, colors, etc.; understand cause and effect; take turns; respect rules.

#### Suggested Activities:

- Take them outdoors!
- Sort cones and types of seeds.
- Tell a tree story and let them make up the ending.
- Make up and sing songs together about local trees.
- Suggest pictures to draw.
- Plant and care for seeds.
- Have them, with closed eyes, identify sounds; with open eyes, list colors and natural objects by color groupings.
- Let them feel different bark textures.
- Have students help plan and do a puppet show.
- Play “Web of Life” circle (each student represents a plant or animal. String is used to show dependencies on others in the circle. Then one is “removed,” so ecological effects are demonstrated).\*

### At ages 6 to 8:

Kids love to . . . learn about “real life” tasks (taking photos, making real things, creating serious collections); play games with more detailed rules; watch magic; engage in group activities.

and are also learning to . . . enjoy reading and solving problems.

#### Suggested Activities:

- Plant and care for a group garden.
- Provide jigsaw puzzles (on nature themes).
- Build models; make nature crafts.
- Stage an Arbor Day play.
- Introduce nature photography.
- Visit museums, zoos, etc.
- Visit an arborist to see what he/she does.
- Teach simple tree identification and how trees grow and touch their lives.

### At ages 9 to 11:

Kids love to . . . read fiction and “how-to” material; learn about careers; fantasize about their future; belong to clubs/ organizations.

and are also learning to . . . understand concepts without hands-on experience; play competitive sports.

#### Suggested Activities:

- Teach skills such as planting.
- Stage an Arbor Day play with elaborate props.
- Help with tree-related activities in scouts, 4-H, and other organizations.
- Do ‘Plant Succession’ Crawl (Kids crawl to or from the edge of a pond, then draw a map of changes in vegetation encountered. Discuss what the pond will look like in the future).\*
- Try poetry reading (e.g. Robert Frost’s ‘Birches’) and writing.

### At ages 12 to 16:

Kids love to . . . show off; test limits; be liked by peers; put feelings into action; improve skills; make new friends.

and are also learning to . . . gain a sense of identity; think in the abstract; develop work habits; look for “heroes” outside their families; be introspective; set goals; take an interest in moral reasoning; adopt role models.

#### Suggested Activities:

- Do park improvement projects.
- Let them help with large scale tree plantings, adopt-a-tree projects.
- Help with forestry and related merit badges.
- Set up recycling projects; sponsor other environmental activities.
- Introduce tree issues that require value judgments.
- Suggest keeping a journal of local phenology (dates flowers and leaves appear on different species).
- Invite participation in tree board projects.
- Arrange for volunteer jobs at zoos, botanical gardens, etc.
- Explain career options in urban forestry, tree care, etc.; arrange talks by professionals.
- Discuss more complex and controversial tree issues.

\*Adapted from *Sharing Nature With Children* by Joseph B. Cornell (Dawn Publications).

## About Those Tree 'Giveaways'...

Distributing seedlings is a popular adjunct to many school programs – usually to the ultimate detriment of the trees! If you plan to distribute seedlings, give them a fighting chance by:

- discussing how to plant and care for them, and including written instructions.
- distributing them at dismissal time.
- having a designated planting area available for children who live in apartments or have no planting space.

Instead of giving away seedlings, consider having them raise their own from a National Arbor Day Foundation Grow Your Own Tree kit. These and other good ideas for teachers or others who work with children can be found at [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org).



- Make it clear how many sessions are involved and if they are indoors or outdoors. If the latter, what foul weather plans will be.
- Discuss where your project best fits into the semester and what material should be covered ahead of time. It is important that field trips, especially, be preceded with other learning activities.
- Find out how many children there are in the class.
- Discuss how many adults will be available to help (teachers, aides, parents, and people from your group).

### Working With Utilities

Your local utility can be one of the best allies you can have in sustainable urban forestry. Trees that grow into electric wires (called 'lines' or 'energized lines' by the industry) represent the opposite of sustainability. They require regular, damaging and expensive pruning. Utilities spend \$1.5 billion annually to keep tree limbs away from their lines, and there are two good reasons to do this: (1) safety, in that lines can kill and if they are within reach of children or others climbing in trees, they are an accident waiting to happen, and (2) the goal of utilities is to provide an uninterrupted flow of energy to people's homes and businesses. When limbs come in contact with wires, outages occur and dangerous downed wires can cause fires or injuries.

The solution to this quandary is for low-maturing trees to be planted beneath or near overhead lines. This is why collaboration with utilities makes such good sense. In communities throughout America, utilities are joining forces with local tree organizations to fund educational campaigns and action projects to replace large, older, decadent trees with 'the right trees for the right place.'

### Other Opportunities for Cooperation With Utilities

In Wisconsin Public Service Corporation's Customer Connection newsletter, 400,000 customers were alerted to the gypsy moth, a major tree pest that eats leaves on most trees and may kill them. Customers were advised not to help the gypsy moth move into new areas by inspecting campers and other outdoor equipment for egg masses after camping in or moving from infested areas.

Colorado Springs Utilities donates time and equipment to chip Christmas trees at designated drop-off points in the city. The resulting mulch is available free to the public and is used in vegetation reclamation projects in the region.

- Arizona Public Service offers a tree replacement program in communities it serves. Where proper pruning on existing trees significantly alters the shape or health of a tree, APS removes the tree and offers the customer a voucher good for a low-growing tree at a local nursery.
- To help their customers plant the right tree in the right place, Clark Public Utilities provides TreeSmart tags to local nurseries to place on trees that won't grow more than 25 feet tall and are appropriate to plant under or near power lines.
- Idaho Power created a "Power Line Friendly" Arboretum at a Pocatello city park. Three each of eighteen different trees that mature at less than 25 feet were planted and identified to give visitors a look at the trees used in the company's tree replacement program.

If there is not a cooperative program with the utility serving your area, contact the person in charge of utility forestry or line clearance (or the public relations staff person) to see about starting one. He or she will be familiar with similar projects.

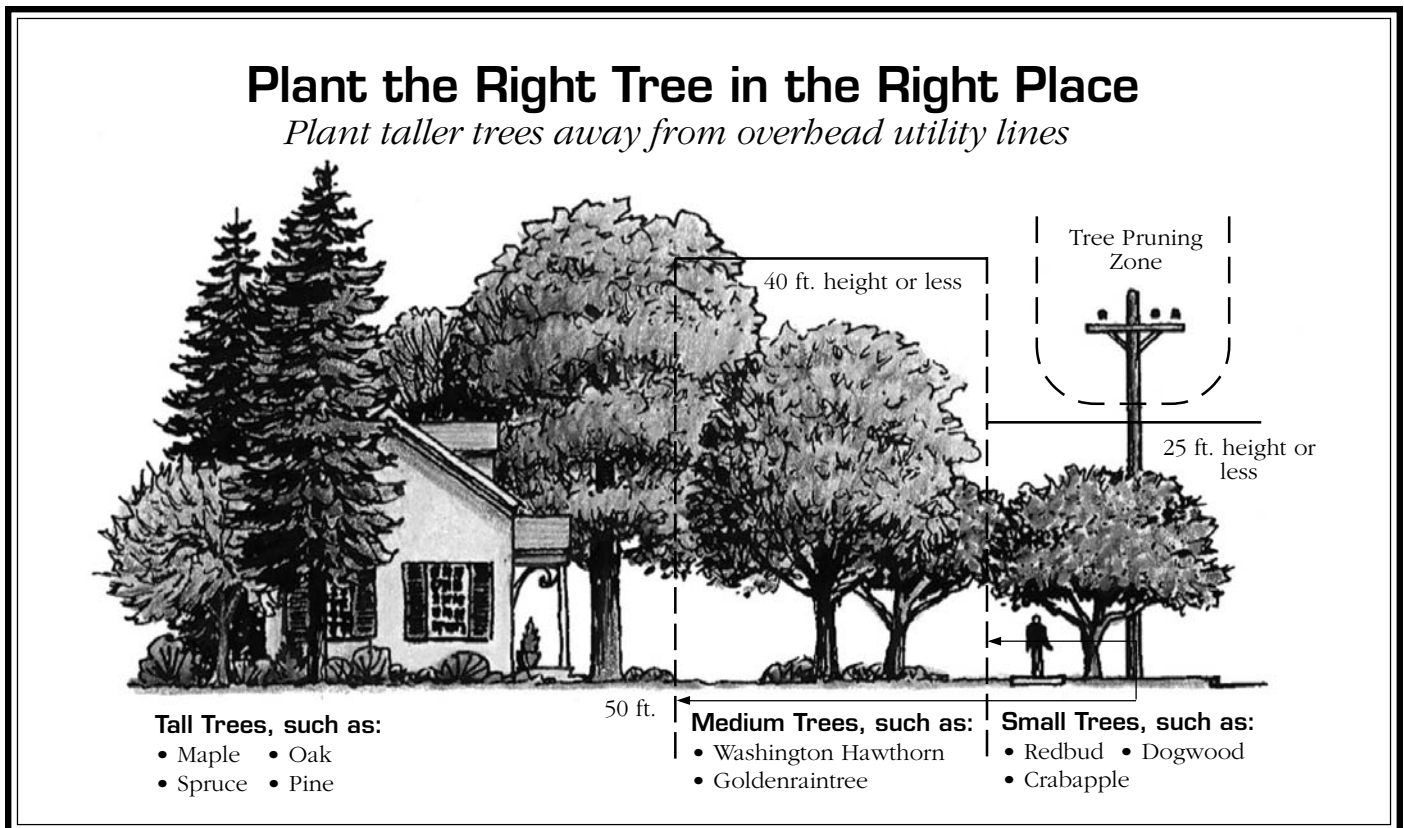
## Tree Line USA

Tree Line USA is an incentive program for utilities similar to the Tree City USA program. It is an excellent way to promote proper tree pruning, the care of roots during underground work, and planting the right tree in the right place. For a utility to receive the Tree Line USA award, it must meet three requirements:

(1) Demonstrate quality tree care by following practices illustrated in the booklets, *Pruning Trees Near Electric Utility Lines* by Alex Shigo and *Trenching and Tunneling Near Trees* by James R. Fazio, (2) Provide annual worker training using concepts explained in the two booklets, and (3) Promote tree planting and public education.

The third criteria is a particularly good opportunity for your organization to work with the utility in publishing local planting and pruning guides, creating inserts for billing envelopes, sponsoring Arbor Day plantings, and cooperating on other projects that will move the urban forest closer to sustainability.

For a list of utilities that are currently Tree Line USA award winners, visit [www.arborday.org/programs/tlusadirectory.html](http://www.arborday.org/programs/tlusadirectory.html). You may also request a copy of the Tree Line USA Application form that presents the award criteria more specifically.



*Most public or investor-owned utilities are more than willing to collaborate with local tree organizations to promote the idea of planting trees that eliminate the conflict between wires and branches.*