

PROMOTING THE URBAN FOREST

CHAPTER EIGHT



Lincoln Journal Star

These are not the kind of circumstances one wishes for in order to promote urban forestry, but when disaster struck, a media giant stepped forward to help both financially and through the skillful use of his own newspaper and other media throughout the area.

The disaster was an early autumn storm that struck Nebraska in 1997. Thirteen inches of wet, heavy snow blanketed the trees before they had fully shed their leaves. The weight was too much. Over 60,000 trees in Omaha alone were damaged, requiring the removal of at least 7,000. Damage in smaller towns was as devastating or more so.

An impressive recovery effort was promptly launched by John Gottschalk, publisher of the Omaha World-Herald. The project was given the title 'Branching Out – Plant a Tree, Grow a

Future.' Gottschalk backed the effort with a \$1 million commitment for replanting trees. With the help of numerous partners, the project also included the dissemination of a wealth of information about making urban forests sustainable in the future. It was taken to people in all walks of life via publications, seminars, newspaper and television and a video about proper tree care. This aggressive and systematic approach to public action and education won for the Omaha World-Herald The National Arbor Day Foundation's 1999 Project Award.

It is often stated that we must 'use the media' in order to make members of the community aware of the benefits provided by trees, or to gain popular support for urban forestry projects and programs. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to understand that the only way you can actually 'use' newspapers, radio or television is to buy advertising space or time. Advertising allows you to present your message exactly the way you want it, when you want it, and as often as you want it. Unfortunately, advertising is expensive and usually beyond the budget of urban forestry organizations.

Instead of trying to 'use the media,' it is better to think in terms of 'working with the media.' Media organizations are in the business of news and other information that sells. Certainly they will use your material and promote your cause, but only on their terms and if it meets their criteria for what is news or otherwise of interest to its audience.

That is where a little knowledge of working with the media comes in handy. It can make all the difference in the world to your ability to get your message to large numbers of people – and at little or no cost.

What Is News?

First, what is not news. Your desire to get residents of a new housing development to add

mulch or remove the stakes from planted trees is certainly a good idea, but this is unlikely to be of importance to the gatekeepers of the media. What is important to us is immaterial – unless you can find a way to show an editor or reporter why the message should be used.

Here are the elements of a potential news story and how you might use them to get your message in the media:

- **Consequence.** The story must be of importance to the media's audience. In the above example, you need to convince an editor that trees are dying or being stressed in new housing developments and costing unwary owners money. At a newspaper, the garden page editor is most likely to listen to this appeal, so take the idea directly to him or her.
- **Timeliness.** The event must have just happened or be about to happen. A fire in progress is timely to all media. But events like tree care have a timeliness of their own. The most interest is in spring or fall when people are more focused on lawn care. Arbor Day is the ideal time to get tree information into the media because of the natural tie-in with a well-known holiday. Upcoming workshops are also timely, or an interview with a well-known person who just spoke to your group.

Free Saplings Allow Hundreds to Start Over

BY JASON GERTZEN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Wounded trees with cracked and broken branches served as a backdrop Saturday at Omaha's Memorial Park for an effort aimed at helping the city recover from last October's ravaging snowstorm.

Hundreds of people began lining up early for up to five free saplings in giveaways at Memorial Park and Miller Park sponsored by The World-Herald and KFAB radio. In all, 35,000 trees were to be given away.

"Like everybody else, I need some trees to replace those that were damaged in the snowstorm," said Ray Mott, who lives near Memorial Park at 55th and Webster Streets.

Mott said the early-season snowstorm last October weighed down tree branches in his yard and left devastation. After cleaning up, he had branches and other debris piled 5 feet high around the perimeter of his yard.

He said that the 2- to 5-foot bare-root saplings given away Saturday may be as skinny as twigs today, but that they eventually will grow

■ Lt. Gov. Kim Robak salutes Arbor Day's Nebraska heritage. Page 11.

to replace some of his yard's massive trees that were destroyed in the storm.

Chuck Wood, a spokesman for The World-Herald, said the sapling giveaway event was part of a wide-ranging program to help the city recover from the storm.



- **Proximity.** Know the region covered by the media with which you are trying to work. The television may include different area coverage than the local or regional newspaper. Make sure your story is pertinent to the included area.
- **Prominence.** If your group plants a tree, it will not likely meet this criterion. However, if the governor comes to town and plants your tree, the story suddenly has this element. That is one of the reasons why it is a good idea to use celebrities in your programs.



Involving a celebrity in a project helps lend it the element of prominence.

- ❑ **Progress.** Example: The reduction of topped trees after a publicity campaign, or updates on an appeal for donations and similar follow-ups to previous stories.
- ❑ **Sex.** Example: The use of pheromones to attract male insect pests to traps.
- ❑ **Suspense.** Example: Efforts to contain a new insect or disease outbreak in a neighboring state or community.
- ❑ **Sympathy.** Example: The loss of someone's prized tree or the decline of a historic tree.
- ❑ **Unusualness.** Example: An out of town World War II veteran returns to the site of his training and donates trees to be planted in honor of his comrades.

Who to Contact

From the above, it should be obvious that much of what happens in urban forestry has genuine news value. Still, to get your story used, you face severe competition with other news and features of the day. To enhance your chances, it is best to work with the appropriate person at the media you are targeting.

At newspapers, news ideas should be presented (ideally in person or by phone) to the managing editor or city editor. He or she will then either assign a reporter to the story or take your copy and give it to someone to edit. For feature story ideas, contact the appropriate feature editor, depending on the

- **Human Interest.** This element allows you to get things in print or on the air that aren't really "news." Human interest are stories that simply appeal to our natural interest in certain subjects.
 - ❑ **Animals.** Example: The needs of urban wildlife (including threats to habitat or campaigns for creating backyard habitat) or problems associated with trees and animals.
 - ❑ **An appeal.** Example: The need to raise money for a good cause, or a request for volunteer pruners to reduce hazards to pedestrians and improve tree form.
 - ❑ **Conflict.** Example: A developer's refusal to save trees, or violations of the city's tree ordinance.
 - ❑ **Old age or youth.** Example: Children planting trees, or residents at a nursing home having a program in which they tell stories of Arbor Days they remember.



A human interest element can get your news in print or on the air.

subject matter. These people are usually listed in the newspaper, or on the paper's Web site. Some possibilities include:

- Garden page editor
- Leisure/Lifestyle section editor
- Outdoor writer or editor
- Farm editor

By reading the paper regularly, you will notice that some columnists tend to favor trees. By all means make your acquaintance with this person and share ideas. You can be sure that he or she is always on the lookout for new material.

At radio and television stations, personnel structures vary from one-person operations to large bureaucracies. In general, the news director is the best contact, but you may need to get advice from a receptionist before deciding who is best to approach.

How to Assure a Good Working Relationship

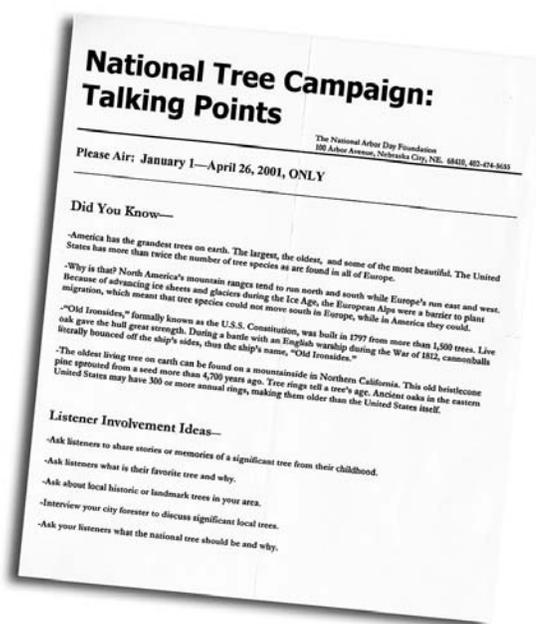
Sometimes there is antagonism between urban forestry groups and local media. More often than not this is the result of not understanding reporters and how to work with them in a way that helps assure accuracy and mutual respect. Here are ten tips that can help you win friends in the media by helping reporters to do their job, and do it well:

1. Respect deadlines and the pressure reporters are under to meet them. Return calls promptly and when submitting material, observe these guidelines:

Afternoon papers – Submit copy before 10 a.m.
 Morning papers – Submit copy before 3 p.m.
 Sunday papers – File by noon Friday or earlier
 Weeklies – As early in the week as possible
 Television and radio – Make contacts early in the day

2. Cooperate fully and cheerfully with reporters. Answer questions completely and honestly. If you don't know, don't guess. Get someone who knows the answer. Never use the mask of "no comment" and if there is information you cannot reveal for some reason, explain why.
3. Do not ask to review copy before it is printed or read on the air, or to have a story suppressed.

4. To help assure accuracy, have something in writing for the reporter. It may be a fact sheet, a directory of names and titles of personnel involved, your management plan, a list of terminology (even the word 'arborist' is foreign or unclear to some reporters) or whatever will provide specific details and correct spelling.
5. Use language the reporter will understand and clearly explain things like 'carbon sequestration' or 'pruning cycles.' Remember, urban forestry is not the reporter's field of expertise or interest.
6. Be cheerful and positive, not evasive or defensive.



Consider handing the reporter a list of main points of information.

7. Know ahead of time points you want to get into the story. Make sure these get into the reporter's notes early in the interview. If you're not asked questions pertinent to your points, think of ways to answer the questions that allow you to work your messages into them. Consider handing the reporter a list of main points of information or key positions on an issue.
8. Try to develop a good relationship with reporters between stories. That is, get to know them socially, or stop in occasionally with information they can have on hand. Make sure they know your area of expertise and your willingness to help them with any stories related to it.

9. Think before you speak. Do not say negative things, even about the opposition in a conflict, and by all means, do not say anything predicated by, "Off the record..." To a reporter, there is no such thing.
10. Finally, be sure to say 'thank you' after a story appears. Doing this in writing is even better.

PSAs Can Help

PSA is short for public service announcement. These are essentially commercials without a product to sell. Whether in print, radio or television, they are often just as lively and catchy as a good commercial, but their purpose is to promote something that is in the public welfare.

Some PSAs are professionally done at the national level and distributed to stations and print media throughout the United States. The National Arbor Day Foundation uses this approach regularly to raise public awareness about the need for community tree care and to promote Tree City USA. One ad, promoting Tree City USA in small communities, has a place at the end called a trailer or tag line, where a local organization can add its identity. In turn, the organization is asked to personally deliver the tape to the local television station, something that always increases the chances of the tape being used.

**Think Of It As
A Really, Really
Bad Haircut...
Which Could
Kill You.**

It's called "tree topping" – the drastic removal of large limbs – and unfortunately, some people still believe it's a good thing. But what they don't know is that topping exposes the tree to disease and decay, leading to the tree's early death. It also permanently destroys the tree's natural shape and beauty, lowering property values. And if a topped tree manages to survive, the new branches that develop will be loosely attached and become extremely hazardous, resulting in additional maintenance costs and property damage.

You can make sure you get a cut your trees can live with by hiring only professional arborists. To find one near you, and for additional information, call 1-877-40 NO TOP (877-406-6867).

**EXPERTS AGREE
DON'T
TOP YOUR
TREE**

A program of The Missouri Community Forestry Council and Forest Practice of Missouri through grants from the Missouri Department of Conservation and the USDA Forest Service.

Public Service Ads in Missouri were professionally produced for an anti-topping campaign and funded by a grant from the Missouri Department of Conservation and the USDA Forest Service.

Radio PSA copy

Sponsor: The National Arbor Day Foundation

Project: Free What Tree Is That? Booklet Offer

Description: Announcer Script

Dates of broadcast: April, 1998

PSA No: 1 & 2

Length: :30 & :10

:30 Version

Announcer: National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April. A free 72-page guidebook is available to help you identify trees to plant. It illustrates the leaves, needles, acorns, berries, seed pods, and cones to help you identify 135 trees. Planting and caring for trees is something each of us can do to improve our community and help the environment. To obtain the free, easy-to-use tree guide, write What Tree Is That?, The Arbor Day Foundation, Nebraska City, Nebraska.

:10 Version

Announcer: National Arbor Day is the last Friday in April. For a free guidebook to help you identify trees to plant, write What Tree Is That?, The Arbor Day Foundation, Nebraska City, Nebraska.

Mike Bowman, city forester for Lewiston, Idaho, has been successful in producing and airing television PSAs on his own – and with virtually no cost to his limited budget. The messages promote the need to water trees, cool streets and parking lots with shade, recycle leaves, and understand the meaning of ‘urban forests.’ Mike wrote the scripts for the PSAs, then went to a local association of advertising agencies. They agreed to underwrite the production costs, arrange for the actors, and handle duplication and distribution. Some organizations, like the Missouri Community Forestry Council and Forest ReLeaf of Missouri, have obtained grants to produce publicity campaigns built largely around public service ads. In this case, the cause was anti-tree topping and the funding purchased the services of professionals to produce the PSAs for newspapers and magazines.

Another way to produce a PSA is to approach the advertising manager at a publication or the managing editor (or public relations person at larger stations) at a television station. Explain your project and limited budget, and ask if the station would cooperate in making a PSA. Some will do this as a public service.

Emergency Information – Using Teachable Moments

Working with the media to successfully place your message before large numbers of people is often a daunting challenge. However, when a storm strikes your community, suddenly there is so much interest in trees from the mass media it is sometimes called a media frenzy!

Since you know that a wind or ice storm is inevitable, why not take advantage of this circumstance to get other information about urban forestry into the media? This can be done through a little planning. Simply prepare a media kit (in manila envelopes, file folders or notebooks) and keep copies on hand. The kit can include information such as:

- How to hire an arborist
- Assessing storm damage and trying to save trees through pruning rather than automatically removing them
- How to prune properly
- How to work safely around trees
- Identifying and reducing hazard trees
- The work of your organization – and its need for year ‘round support



Because of public interest in the storm and its aftermath (real news), reporters will be interested in any ‘sidebar’ story related to the disaster. Being prepared with typed copy, illustrations, and offers to be interviewed (or a list of experts to interview), will allow you to take advantage of this teachable moment.

Two Tried and True Methods

Here are two more ways to get your message into the mass media – free.

The News Release

The most common method of delivering ‘news’ to media is the news release. These sometimes work, but often they are lost in the stacks of other releases that arrive daily at the offices of newspapers, radio and television stations. For the best chance of being used, hand deliver the release or address it to a specific person (perhaps with a phone call to alert him or her that it is coming). Remember the points about what makes news, then follow these guidelines and hope for the best:

- ✓ Be sure to include the five “w’s” of reporting: who, what, where, when and why, and put the most important information in the first sentences. Very likely the last paragraphs will get cut off if space or air time is limited.

NEWS

United States
Department of
Agriculture

1249 S. Vinnell Way
Suite 200
Boise ID, 83709
208-373-4100

BOISE NATIONAL FOREST



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Information Contact:
Jennifer Jones
(208) 373-4105

MEDIA ADVISORY ARBOR DAY ACTIVITIES SATELLITE FEED AVAILABLE

This Friday, Idahoans will celebrate Arbor Day by participating in special events and activities throughout the state. The purpose of Arbor Day, which was established in 1872 and is celebrated in Idaho on the last Friday of April each year, is to highlight the important role that trees play in our daily lives and the renewability of this precious natural resource.

On Friday, April 24, a satellite feed featuring Arbor Day activities and information will be available.

- ✓ Type your release on letterhead paper that includes phone, fax and e-mail contacts in case there are questions.
- ✓ Double space your release and use only one side of a sheet. In the case of print media, phone to see if e-mailed copy or a disk would be preferred.
- ✓ Keep it short and well-focused.
- ✓ Releases to the news departments of radio stations should be written in a way they can be read on the air. This may include showing phonetic spellings of difficult names and using introductory sentences that alert the listener to what is coming rather than giving all the main details as in print. For example:

There is a new threat to trees in Midville. A tree has been discovered in East City Park showing signs of infection by Asian longhorned beetles...

A Letter to the Editor

The most read part of most newspapers is the letters section. In small communities, virtually all letters get printed, sometimes without much shortening or other editing. In larger papers, your letter may or may not be selected, but short, well-written letters have a very good chance of ending up in print.

Letters are a good way to convey information about the urban forest. Letters can be used to extend thanks for support or participation in a project, announce an upcoming event of local importance, counter rumors, give warnings and urge action, or for just about any other kind of message you want people to receive. This method of getting your message to large numbers of people works well if you don't over-use it (in which case the paper will stop using them).

Others

Promoting the urban forest through use of the mass media is a challenge to the imagination.



Contact the hosts of shows that use guests.

Listen to, watch and read the media in your community. Think about how you can imitate others who have been successful. Try contacting the hosts of shows that use guests, or inviting news personalities to be speakers at your events, or even sponsors. Sustainable urban forestry is an

important subject with plenty of news and human interest value. All it needs is a media-savvy person with determination and the chances are good that you can reach large segments of your community with the information it needs.

PlantAmnesty – Masters of Publicity

Seattle landscape gardener Cass Turnbull set aside her pruning shears in 1987 and took up the pen, so to speak. Actually, she continues her professional care of other people’s yards and grounds, and she used more than a pen to become one of the nation’s most outspoken champions for proper tree care. She is the founder of PlantAmnesty and a skillful master of free or low cost media publicity.



Courtesy of PlantAmnesty

Cass was fed up with seeing “vast numbers of living trees and shrubs ... being stupidly destroyed and uglified.” She began a campaign that continues today to put a stop to tree topping and other poor practices. Her organization’s motto is *secare selecte* – prune selectively. To get that message across, PlantAmnesty uses a combination of controversy and humor. The goal is “to end the senseless torture and mutilation of trees and shrubs” and one of the key tools in doing that is the use of media publicity. Here are a few of the tactics Cass and her colleagues use to keep their messages ever-present in the Seattle area:

Cass Turnbull, founder of PlantAmnesty, has wed humor and an aggressive approach to publicity to successfully take the message of tree care to a wide audience in the Pacific Northwest.

- ✓ Humorous PSAs created with grant money and made available to other communities at nominal cost
- ✓ Media coverage through an annual ‘ugly yard’ contest and other attention-getting events
- ✓ News releases about PlantAmnesty’s programs and positions on local controversies related to trees
- ✓ Articles to local media about topping, poodleballing and better ways to prune and landscape
- ✓ A slide show for public presentations, workshops, a booth at home and garden shows – and an aggressive willingness at all of these to be interviewed by reporters.

For more information about PlantAmnesty and its programs, write to: P.O. Box 15377, Seattle, WA 98115-0377 or visit the Web site www.plantamnesty.org.