

The International Language of Arboriculture:

An Arborist Exchange Report from Ontario to Germany

by Aurelio Magazzeni, Forestry Supervisor, Welland, Ontario



Pollarded black locusts in downtown Bottrop • Photo: Aurelio Magazzeni

Following is a brief overview of my once-in-a-lifetime experience, an arborist exchange with Winfried Funke of Bottrop, Germany, a city that has many similarities to my home town of Welland, Ontario. Given the opportunity, I am certain that I could fill this entire magazine!

Winfried had already visited the City of Welland in late August 2007. In his short stay with us, he became good friends with our forestry crew, and we developed a bond that anyone in the industry can appreciate. Two months later, it was my turn to fly to Germany, where Winfried picked me up and took me to his home with his girlfriend, Kirsten. They had acquired their home just one week prior to my arrival and had hastily prepared a comfortable room for me. I will never forget their generosity.

The City of Bottrop is located in Central West Germany and has a population of approximately 120,000. Like Welland, it is a former industrial city, but much older, dating back to the early 1800s. Bottrop's largest industry was coal mining; several mines are still in operation today. Bottrop is well known as one of the greenest cities in the area; it is well treed and has over 820 green spaces maintained by the City. Many abandoned mines and brown fields have been redeveloped into commercial space as well as tourist destinations.

The first thing that I noticed about Bottrop was the cleanliness of the streets and the pride in home own-

ership. Residents embrace outdoor recreation; there are over 100 km (62 miles) of designated cycling and walking paths. In the evening, almost all municipal parking lots abutting parklands are full, and people take advantage of groomed hiking trails and many outdoor activities. The residents are friendly, live healthy and are environmentally conscious.

All urban forestry personnel in Bottrop are employed by the City Parks Department. This department consists of approximately 91 employees responsible for cemetery operations, playing field maintenance, horticulture, turf maintenance, and urban forestry. Surprisingly, Bottrop does not have any arenas or baseball diamonds. Soccer is the sport of choice, with over 16 soccer fields used regularly. The City also owns approximately 30 schools and is charged with maintaining associated trees, turf areas and playgrounds.

Bottrop's urban forestry crew is much like Welland's, employing a forestry supervisor, one lead hand and five arborists. Their equipment is similar; however, their aerial trucks are not insulated. All of the City's utilities are underground, making a very safe working condition when working aloft, and the trees are allowed to reach their full potential with natural looking crowns unaltered by hydro (utility line) clearing.

The city arborists are responsible for maintaining approximately 15,000 street trees and thousands more in parks, cemeteries and green spaces. Approximately 250 trees are planted per year, while 250-300 trees are removed per year. In 2007, 450 trees were removed due to severe wind storm damage.

Young trees planted along City streets are approximately 70 mm (2.75 inch) caliper, balled and burlapped, and all lower branches to a height of 2.2 m (7 feet) have been pruned off at the nursery. This practice is necessary because of narrow streets; all mature trees are trimmed and elevated to a height of 4.4 m (14 feet). Large vehicles, such as trucks, require the clearance. At a glance, the exposed trunks and elevated limbs look odd—but one quickly gets accustomed to it after learning the reason for the practice.

All new trees planted are supported by three large wooden stakes, generally fastened with a natural fiber rope that apparently decomposes in a couple of years.



London plane trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*) growing in a tight space alongside cycling and walking path • Photo: Aurelio Maggazi



Host Winfried Funke (left) and Aurelio Maggazi

The tall slender trunks of new trees are wrapped with a natural grass type material approximately 1 m (3 feet) high, which, by stabilizing temperatures, helps prevent frost cracks. Every street tree over 15 years of age is inspected twice per year, once in early summer when in full leaf, and once in the winter. The largest population of trees is the linden (*Tilia cordata* 'Greenspire' and *Tilia x europaea* 'Pallida'), followed by the London plane tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*). Bottrop has a much more diverse tree community than Welland because of its temperate climate and very good soil conditions.

Bottrop is fortunate enough to also employ a woodland forestry crew, consisting of a six-man team that manages approximately 310 hectares (766 acres) of City woodlands. Trees to be removed are marked by a provincial forester, harvested by the City's forestry crew and sold to logging contractors. Interestingly enough, these logs are not cut into lumber because most of them are impregnated with bomb shrapnel from the Second World War. Instead, they are ground into chips and processed into various wood products.

The City's forestry supervisor is tasked with tree inspections, maintaining the street tree inventory, conducting hazardous tree assessments, and issuing permits for tree removal on private property. Residents wishing to remove a tree greater than 60 cm (24 inches) in circumference must apply for a permit. They receive approximately 500 requests per year; of those, 50-60 requests are denied. Fines for illegal tree removal are very hefty at 5000 Euros (U.S. \$7328).

Winfried was gracious enough to drive me around to many different areas outside of Bottrop. We visited the Town of Erle, which is famous for preserving a 1,000-plus-year-old English oak (*Quercus robur*), with its history documented at a nearby church. This grand old

tree stands stoically and has weathered many storms, its huge lateral limbs supported with many upright timbers, and its top reduced to keep it from imploding on itself. The massive trunk is approximately 4 m (13 feet) in diameter and is supported by steel rods crisscrossing its interior like a spider's web; however, it is hollow enough to walk through. The leaves are as green and healthy as any tree a fraction of its age.

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Aurelio Maggazeni stands at the mouth of a thousand-year-old English oak (*Quercus robur*) in Erle, Germany.



Exchange host Winfried Funke, center, with Bottrop City Arborists Michael Schilling (left) and Michael Kutz (right)
Photo: Aurelio Maggazeni

Thank you, Asheville Conference silent auction donors, patrons, and organizers, for making the 2007 Arborist Exchange possible.

West of this masterpiece is a row of American chestnuts (*Castanea dentata*) reported to be several hundred years old, with a full mature crop of nuts ready to be dried and roasted.

After working with Winfried and his colleagues for a week, I was treated to a tour of a wood chipper manufacturing company, Schliesing. I survived a 60-minute trip on the Autobahn, which would probably be a two-hour drive for most of us here in Canada.

An unexpected stopover in Krefeld proved to me that it is indeed a small world after all. I had the pleasure of visiting a former Wellander (Shane Wright), who moved to Germany eight years ago to play professional hockey. Coincidentally, his father (Robert) recently retired from the City of Welland Parks Department.

Bottrop proved to be a very diverse and exciting City. Its people are passionate about their urban forests, their recreation and their heritage. I would like to thank all the staff at the City of Bottrop Parks Department, especially the forestry crew members, who made me feel like part of their team. Thanks to Winfried Funke and Kirsten for taking me in and instantly making me feel at home despite my inability to speak German. Thank you to Exchange Coordinator Doug Still from the SMA, and thank you, City of Welland staff, for making Winfried feel welcome in our community.

I recently spoke with Winfried, who is planning to visit us in two years. These are the types of friendships that grow from these exchanges, and I highly recommend them to any municipal arborist. 🌿