

Arborist Exchange Program – Fort Wayne, Indiana

By Mike Esson

William Diedrichs visited New Zealand and Wellington earlier in 2003 (see *City Trees*, Vol 39, No 4: July/August 2003,). My trip to Bill's city started when I left my partner Nina and our 3-month-old baby girl Ihāpera at Auckland Airport on August the 4th 2003. Hours after looking out across the litmus land mass that is North America I arrived in Fort Wayne.

The US military presence was clearly visible; fighter jets lined up across the airport, at an adjoining military airfield. I was sure that there was more air combat hardware lined up in front of me than New Zealand's entire armed wing.

From what I saw of the surrounding country I had landed in the middle of an entirely flat area dominated by corn and soybean production. I received a warm welcome and we headed for dinner at Bill's home. The next day I went to work with Bill. First stop was Bill's office and a welcome from the Parks Director. I received a package of information on Fort Wayne's many recreational opportunities provided by the city's Parks Department. Bill has some 16 years with the city and over that time has been involved in all aspects of the arboricultural management of the city's 61,000 plus street trees. We proceeded to drive the streets visiting the day's tally of public inquiries and reports as well as checking in on a contract tree crew and their progress with the very efficiently planned street tree maintenance program. The majority of trees lining the older central residential suburbs are deciduous hardwood species; we passed under mature street tree canopies of *Fraxinus*, *Acer*, *Gleditsia* and *Quercus*. I was totally impressed by the canopy encompassing the streets. Bill commented that before Dutch Elm Disease (DED) reached Fort Wayne, a large percentage of the city's main and central streets were shaded by majestic avenues of American elm *Ulmus americana*. Bill still has a few, now numbering fewer than 20 mature elms. We visited a number of these trees, two showing the classic signs of the disease. In New Zealand we have had DED since 1989.

On our travels Bill would stop and mark dead trees for immediate removal, one was a Lombardy poplar no more than 10 meters high. I have a photo of Bill tree hugging a Lombardy poplar in Christchurch New Zealand over a meter in diameter, 30 meters high, and over 100 years of age. I was as surprised by this Fort Wayne tree as Bill had been with the Lombardy

Poplars in New Zealand. Bill informed me they don't grow any larger in Fort Wayne. For that matter there didn't appear to be many very large trees. One of the larger trees was a very large Black Oak in one of the city's larger parks. This tree had a distinct watermark approximately 1 meter up its trunk from recent flooding. It was hard to imagine the water standing there in the shade of such a solid tree.

Many of the trees I saw along the streets were in varying degrees of decline. Many would be removed within the week if they were in Wellington. However this needs to be put in context, as the level of pests and diseases affecting the tree population in Fort Wayne is magnitudes above what I have experienced in New Zealand. However, in New Zealand we are now facing an increasing proportion of our aging city trees suffering from previously rarely seen pathogens. Because the sea surrounds New Zealand, introductions of fungi are rare, but native and the few introduced fungal species are becoming more numerous on the aging trees.

Bill introduced me to tree injection. He demonstrated injecting Pin Oaks with nutrients to relieve their chlorotic symptoms. This practice is very rare in New Zealand.

A visit to some new suburbs in the city presented me with a common issue in my home city where the indigenous forest is being cleared for residential sections and uniform streets with a single street tree planted in an ever decreasing grass verge [tree lawn]. However in the more mature central suburbs as demonstrated in Fort Wayne, these meager plantings can produce a street canopy that adds much to the urban environment.

Further out of the city we visited a landscape friend of Bill's who coordinates a program called Hoosier Releaf. They grow and plant indigenous trees, and are supported by The National Tree Trust. The local nursery is somewhat overgrown this year, as the teams of volunteers have stayed away for fear of catching 'West Nile Virus' from mosquitoes. The group has planted thousands of trees over the past years and hopes to undertake further planting after the anxiety surrounding the virus lessens. As part of Hoosier Releaf's operation, bio-waste is mulched and composted in rows that are turned regularly by a most impressive machine. From Hoosier Releaf we

headed further out of town to look over a saw milling operation run by an Amish family. The sawmill is a relatively large operation with a dozen people working. The majority of the saws had just been converted from hydraulic motors to electric ones run by a large diesel generator. The mill was cutting boards from Black Walnut, Red Oak, and Ash. Further down the road we witnessed tree felling in a small block of forest and log extraction by horses. The older gentleman running the logging and saw milling business said he had first cut trees in this small wood 30 years ago. The trees are harvested under an informal selective logging regime. To my surprise, natural forest stands are relatively common in this area. There are many ranging from 1 to 20 acres. It was difficult to look in any direction and not see a small forest stand.

The next day we met with arborists from towns all over Indiana at a state urban foresters field trip similar to those held by our Farm Forestry association in New Zealand. We were briefed about a newly discovered pest species infecting Ash trees in neighboring states; the Emerald Ash Borer. From the description and experiences given it is clear that this pest is likely to cause significant damage to Ash trees if and when it gets into Fort Wayne. This is all the more serious as *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* makes up 17% of the Fort Wayne street tree population. Ash is also one of the main species planted by Hoosier Releaf.

The field trip bus traveled north of Fort Wayne through Indiana. In Elkhart, we picked up two foresters and headed for their tree nursery. Trees were specifically grown for selected planting sites for up to five years. There was a problem with deer grazing the trees back in the winter when snow covered the ground. (Deer in New Zealand are restricted to our outer rural forest areas and are very rarely discovered close to urban areas). Later we moved on to the town of Goshen where we discussed a recent program to produce an inventory of tree populations in a number of the smaller cities and towns throughout Indiana. My thanks to Berney Fisher for organizing this field trip to coincide with my visit to Fort Wayne.

The following day Bill and I headed north towards Chicago. This turned out to be a much longer drive than we anticipated. We drove north and visited a number of reserve areas of forest among the State Forest Reserve on the shores of Lake Michigan. This provided a chance to walk through native forest and see the forest diversity and ecosystems up close.

One of these areas was swamp forest. Clearly a flavored habitat for unidentified biting beasts, very small, very fast, they were like a swarm of tiny black mirages.

Quickly we pressed on towards the big smoke. Driving into Chicago was a challenge for the uninitiated. I was trying to make sense of the map and highway signage. It was nice to see trees lining the shoreline, the sky and lake both blue, tall buildings ahead. From what I saw of the city's tree planting, it is well organized with a substantial tree population. By the time we entered the central city Bill was keen to exit before we became locked into the homeward traffic. We did however stop and walk around a couple of central city blocks. Finding the best route out proved even more of a challenge than the way in. As we traveled out along large highway roads I was impressed with the amount of tree planting along the route. Such planting left me with a good impression of this city, I only wished I could have spent more time and met some the urban foresters responsible for the recent plantings.

The next day was again a long drive south, but this time to see a little of Indiana's capital, Indianapolis. Again, I was struck by the numerous small forest blocks spread throughout the countryside as we traveled along straight flat roads.

My last day in Fort Wayne was spent accompanying Bill on his rounds through the city's streets. It was a very enjoyable relaxing day. The inner city residential area is very beautiful, with a mix of large shade trees over quiet streets among fine turn of the century homes. I took many photos and short movies as we cruised among the tree lined, canopy covered streets.

We headed for the airport. Farewell and many thanks to Bill for hosting me and thanks to Fort Wayne and all the people I met along the way. I began my long trip back across the large North American landmass to San Francisco onto LA and back to New Zealand.

This exchange trip and the experiences and people I met along the way have broadened my professional development. The experience was rich and fulfilling. Face to face communication is a very powerful method of exchanging management ideas, sharing challenges and providing encouragement to pursue excellence in urban tree management. Even now six months later, I am still drawing on those experiences as I go about my work. I can only recommend the exchange and the rewards it will bring to municipal arborists around the world. I have often found that

even within New Zealand, arborists may find themselves tackling similar problems to one another. Even with our highly developed communication systems we may still repeat the same mistakes and struggle with problems that others have already tackled. The pace of life is fast, workloads increasing, and it often seems technology only aids us to further our workload. The exchange offers time out, time to look, listen, learn and reflect. I am greatly indebted to the experience. I feel there is a place for it even on a national level within a small country like New Zealand. Since my return I have become more interested in providing articles for our professional associations magazine 'Tree Matters' and web site 'nzarbor.org.nz'. The potential to provide services and information to our members is huge. My interest and passion for trees and the benefits trees provide our communities is undiminished even now as my timber business grows and places greater demands on my time and energy. I would encourage exchange arborists to plan their trips to take full advantage of

events such as conferences, local, regional and national conventions and seminars.

Many thanks to the Society of Municipal Arborists and ACRT for providing me with the opportunity to participate in this wonderful exchange program. I strongly encourage all municipal arborists to apply and further the goals of the program by participating as fully as possible.

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The SMA and ACRT, Inc. have teamed up to sponsor the highly successful Arborists Exchange Program.

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