

An Italian Arborist in Milwaukee

by Dr. Gianmichele Cirulli, Urban Forest Manager, Turin, Italy

Photos by Scott Baran, City of Milwaukee Forestry Division

Last October I spent a week in the City of Milwaukee courtesy of the SMA Arborists Exchange Program. I was hosted by Milwaukee Forestry Services Manager David Sivyer. I found the exchange a significant experience not only from a professional point of view, but from a personal one; in a certain way, it can be compared to an international student exchange program. Living for a week with a person who is basically a stranger, with whom you have just exchanged some e-mails, can be a gamble, but in my opinion this is one of the strong points of this program.

This is true above all when considering its impact on work. Spending a week in close contact with foreign colleagues, visiting worksites, and discussing problems and solutions on the spot cannot be compared to congress/workshop attendance, which is usually much shorter and more superficial.

Besides the warm welcome I received from David and his family, the colleagues from Milwaukee Forestry Services were very kind and friendly to me since the first moment I met them, and I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for the time they gave me and for putting up

with my broken English. During my stay, I experienced great hospitality and the people I met were all very friendly and helpful.

What shall I say about Milwaukee? It is a pleasant city with residential areas and wide greenspaces that create a relaxing atmosphere. Lake Michigan is a distinctive feature of the landscape; this lake has nothing to do with the Italian or European concept of lake: its appearance, its surface area, and even its smell resemble those of the sea. As in the majority of American cities, in Milwaukee you find a centre with its main business area (downtown) and the areas outside the centre of the city where people live (the suburbs).

The urban landscape is an important feature of Milwaukee, and its street trees, boulevards, and greenspaces make it a very nice city. Milwaukee contains more than 3.4 million trees; street trees (approximately 200,000) are mostly in residential areas and usually don't exceed 10-15 meters (32 to 49 feet) in height, while big trees, the so-called veterans, are mainly present in parks.

Now I would like to consider the main differences between the organization and the activities of the Urban Forest Management Department of Turin, Italy, and that of Forestry Services in the City of Milwaukee. First, unlike my department, Milwaukee Forestry Services uses an in-house approach; the majority of forestry activities (design, planning, and management) are done by staff working within the Department of Public Works.

Administrative staff, forest planners, some technicians and managers work in the headquarters, while other technicians and gardeners work in three different territorial units. In my opinion, this kind of organization involves both advantages and disadvantages: On the one hand it enhances cooperation between technicians and gardeners; on the other, it could create a sort of barrier between the headquarters and the local units. Moreover, the staff might not feel part of the same structure.

The first unit I visited was the repair garage, where four people attend to machine repair and maintenance in-house. Despite a budget and staff reduction they are highly motivated and do their job with great efficiency.

I would like to underline that I found the people working in Milwaukee Forestry Services, from forest planners to



Gianmichele Cirulli and Milwaukee Forestry Services Manager David Sivyer in front of the City's largest remaining elm street tree



The Milwaukee Art Museum



Milwaukee skyline fall color



Sustainable landscape planting at Court of Honor on Milwaukee's Wisconsin Avenue



Marquette University gateway boulevard with Freeman maples (*Acer x freemanii*)



Newberry Boulevard in Milwaukee, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted

arborists and technicians, very keen to work. I believe motivation plays a crucial role in work: Being eager and willing to do something helps you to overcome problems and to achieve good results.

Forestry Services excels at best-practice approaches for management of serious urban forest pests such as Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Since EAB arrived in 2002, more than 50 million trees in the U.S. have been killed by this beetle. In Milwaukee alone, 33,000 ash trees could potentially be infested by this insect. I found the strategies adopted by Forestry Services very proactive and innovative. Thanks to a deep scientific knowledge of the problem, they have mounted an effective offensive against this destructive beetle. Furthermore, they have waged a public campaign to inform private landowners about the problem and how to combat it.

Another case of excellence in Milwaukee Forestry Services is the use of i-Tree, a model which provides urban forestry analysis and benefits assessment tools. Milwaukee used i-Tree Eco to evaluate the damages caused by the EAB infestation and to measure EAB structural and functional impacts.

One of the initiatives that impressed me the most is the crew training organized by the City's Forestry Services department in conjunction with local partners. The purpose of this arboriculture training is to provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter the urban forestry profession, thus expanding their employment opportunities. I believe that this initiative can be beneficial both for Forestry and the participants. Forestry can gain from a young workforce, while participants can learn specialized skills, achieve arborist certification, and earn some money at the same time.

Generally speaking, Milwaukee's Forestry Services depart-



Gianmichele with Milwaukee Urban Forestry Manager Randy Krouse



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In-house climbing and other types of arborist training are conducted by Milwaukee staff.

ment seemed to me a well organized structure, engaged in different projects with an innovative approach, and constantly striving to improve. The results achieved are very good, not only in my opinion—Milwaukee urban forestry is a beacon for urban forestry around the U.S.

After work hours I took the opportunity to go sightseeing in order to better know and appreciate Milwaukee. Besides the Harley Davidson Museum (I could not miss it!), I visited Discovery World (a lakefront science and technology museum), the Art Museum (iconic for Milwaukee for its collections and its stunning architecture designed in part by Spanish Architect Santiago Calatrava), and the Fonzie statue (a TV icon in the 1970s for many teenagers, not only in the USA but also in Italy).

After a week in Milwaukee I attended the ISA Leadership Workshop in Champaign, Illinois as a board member of the

Italian chapter. The purpose of the workshop was to provide dedicated time for the participants to share ideas and learn about best practices and emerging ISA programs and activities. More than 60 representatives from different chapters participated in this event; I had the opportunity to spend three days in close contact with colleagues from all over the world. Moreover, I met the ISA Staff and Board of Directors and visited the ISA headquarters office. Though I found the atmosphere quite informal, the workshop was conducted in a highly professional way.

My American experience was extremely positive, and I would like to thank and congratulate SMA and Exchange Sponsor Davey Resource Group and express the hope that this initiative will continue so that other arborists can have the opportunity for such a stimulating and rewarding experience.

David, I wait for you in Turin! 🌿



Milwaukee signature bed on Teutonia Street