

Participants:

Full-time consultants

Bob Cool is retired from the Superintendent of Forestry position, City of Lansing, Michigan.

Shirl McMayon formerly worked as Director of Natural Resources for the Chicago Park District.

Becky Wegner formerly worked as a Forester for the City of Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Part-time consultants

Don Goulding is Landscape Inspector for the City of Hollywood, Florida.

Daniel Kurkowski is Associate Forester with the City of Detroit, Michigan.

Aaron Reed is City Forester for Aspen, Colorado.



Aaron Reed

How did you get into consulting?

Goulding: It was a natural progression: Landscape worker, horticultural degree, landscape designer/contractor, municipal nursery supervisor, landscape inspector, ISA certified arborist, ASCA registered consulting arborist.

Kurkowski: A friend who is a professional garden consultant and national speaker, Janet Macunovich, referred me. She is the founder of the Michigan School of Gardening and now the on-line Practical Gardening Institute. She originally asked me to be a consultant for a couple of landscapes she was working on. I now work as a part-time instructor for the school and manage the Trees folder at www.practicalgardeninginstitute.com.

Wegner: I worked as a forester (under the City Forester) for the City of Colorado Springs for 20 years (1980-2001). I did everything from mountain pine beetle and Dutch elm disease surveys and condemnations to inventories, hazard tree assessments, volunteer planting events, large-scale planting programs, and the day-to-day of working with trees and citizens. During this time I also did a small amount of consulting, tree appraisals, forest plans, and even was an expert witness. I left not to retire but to have more flexibility in my schedule for young children.

Describe your first job or two.

Cool: In 1970 I did a street tree inventory for Hillsdale, Michigan and got involved in timber sales, which utilized my traditional forestry background.

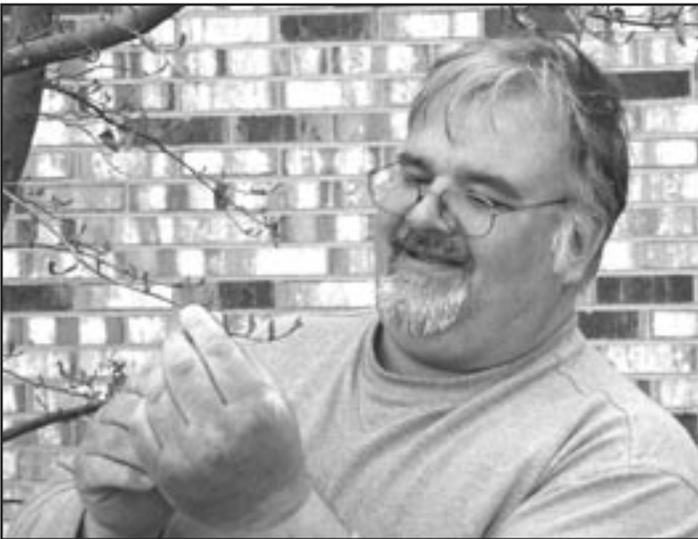
Goulding: My first private consulting job came as a referral from another ASCA Consulting Arborist. I assessed the condition of three oak trees in Stuart, Florida, and made recommendations on their care.

Kurkowski: My first job was for a woman whose Colorado blue spruce had been butchered by a roofing company. They had sheared off one side of the tree with roofing hammers to make space for throwing shingles down. She had taken it down but wanted to sue for the value of the tree. My second job was for a gentleman who had surrounded his two-acre parcel with spruces and Douglas-firs. He was totally perplexed by the tip dieback he was seeing and was positive his evil neighbors were spraying something to kill his trees. I diagnosed it as frost damage and downloaded the weather reports from March to prove it.

Reed: My first job was assisting a colleague of my wife's on the selective removal of several trees on her property in order to alleviate risks of failures in multi-stem cottonwoods and boxelders. Second was assessing the long-term survivability of a historic tree in western Colorado—a tree very significant to surviving populations of the Ute Tribe and one that has had significant disturbance around it over the years.

What was the most challenging thing about getting your consulting business going?

Cool: For me it was finding the time to consult and not violating any employer rule. It required working nights, weekends,



Daniel Kurkowski

holidays, vacation days, and any other days available when I could legally be away from my main employer.

McMayon: The hardest thing was jumping off the proverbial cliff—leaving the comfort of having a regular paycheck, insurance, etc. All of the connections, experience, and networking were in place—I just needed to find the courage and confidence to quit my “real job” and move back into self-employment!

Wegner: Marketing the consulting part of a small tree care business that my husband manages has been the biggest challenge. I am a tree person, not a marketer. Thrown into a growing tree care company, I already had much to do. Yet I found opportunities for



Shirl McMAYON



Don Goulding

consulting, and that piece of the business has slowly grown. There have been appraisals, inventories, forest health plans, and hazard tree assessments.

How much energy does it take to avoid conflicts of interest?

Kurkowski: There have been none so far, because I don't consult within my municipality. Since I only do light pruning, I sometimes suggest companies that do heavier work. I am always careful to suggest several so as not to play favorites, and I always give the client basic guidelines for hiring, such as making sure the arborist is certified, insured, and bonded.

Goulding: It doesn't take much energy at all. At this time I don't take jobs within the City limits, jobs that oppose other cities, or jobs with entities that do business with my employer city.

Describe one consulting job you turned down and why.

Cool: I turned down a legal case where the lawyer told me my answers before I had seen the tree in question. As a consultant, your answer is the same no matter which side you are on.

Goulding: There was a dispute between a municipality and a power company I work with on a regular basis in my job with the City of Hollywood—a definite conflict of interest.

Kurkowski: A request came in on the gardening message board that I moderate for a consultant to come out and help advise on moving some Norway maples trees. I told her to just cut them down and replant!

Reed: A developer wanted a report supporting its practice of destroying trees without due regard and was offering large sums of money as bait.

What is a hidden benefit of consulting vs. being an MA?

Cool: Things move much faster with consulting projects because they are segmented into smaller, more defined pieces. Government is really slow to change.

McMayon: I enjoy working more closely with the problem at hand.

Wegner: I work just as many hours and just as hard as I once did as an MA, but I now have control of when those hours are. Other benefits include fewer meetings and not working in a political environment. I focus more now on individual trees or projects vs. the bigger picture. On the down side, sometimes I miss having an impact on the larger community, and as a consultant I have to write a lot more reports than I did as a city forester.

What books do you refer to most often in your consulting?

McMayon: The three books I consult most often: *Guide for Plant Appraisal* by the Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers; *Trees and Development: A Technical Guide to Preservation of Trees During Land Development*, by Nelda Matheny & James R. Clark; and *Arboriculture* by Richard W. Harris, James R. Clark, and Nelda Matheny.

Wegner: Probably the most beneficial book has been ASCA's (American Society of Consulting Arborists) *A Consultant's Guide to Writing Effective Reports*, edited by Christine A. Keefer.

In addition to SMA and the unique urban forestry/municipal arboriculture perspective it offers, which professional organizations are you involved with that have served you well in your consulting work?

Cool: The Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF), International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), and the Michigan chapter of ISA/MFPA.

McMayon: First, ASCA and their professionalism and willingness to share information with newbies through the annual conference, the newsletter, and the Listserve.

Second, ISA: I have watched this organization grow and mature, and I'm very supportive of its efforts to make the arboriculture industry safer and more professional.

Lastly, ALCA (Associated Landscape Contractors of America)—a group of executive landscape professionals seeking to better the green industry, set standards, and promote professionalism and safety.

Wegner: I've found memberships in both ASCA and ISA to be beneficial to consulting. 🌿