

President's MESSAGE



Speak Up and Speak Out

The other day, I was on my usual morning commute from home to the shop, and was tuned in to a local radio channel listening to the morning news. The local radio announcer was reading from his scripted news briefs and began reporting on a story that made my ears perk up and listen. He read a statement from the WDNR about this year's gypsy moth forecast. Then the announcer offered his personal comments on the situation causing an autonomic response of rolling my eyes and shaking my head in disbelief.

He started by commenting that gypsy moths are terrible this year because every night when he turns on his porch light he has more moths than ever buzzing his light bulb. His fellow reporter also felt the need to chime in with his opinion and agreed that the gypsy moths were bad in his neighborhood as well. He supported his claim by saying there were lots of birds in his lawn eating the eggs that were in the grass. He also

commented that he saw video clips of the Detroit Tigers baseball field loaded with birds as well. He mentioned the field maintenance crews applied an insecticide to the field to kill the gypsy moths and eliminate the birds' food source.

I'm sure everyone reading the WAA newsletter knows what a bunch of caterpillar dung was spewing from these two reporters' mouths. I normally shrug off these comments, while thinking ignorance can be bliss. Not this day, however. It was time for me to speak up.

Why? Because there are tens of thousands of listeners to these radio programs in north-east Wisconsin alone. There must also be thousands of listeners who take the word of those on the air as gospel. Certainly, there are other types of media reporters (TV, newspapers, Internet, etc.) who report on the news and unintentionally misquote or mistakenly edit all the facts. If I didn't speak up, another war of the worlds could have been underway! Well, not really, but certainly another super-sized tree myth was well underway. Is this type of reporting the main source of arboricultural education to the public?

So, what do a couple of rambling reporters have to do with the WAA anyway? Why should the members of the WAA even care? I'll tell you why we care. The WAA is constantly trying to promote the image of the arborists as professionals. We also want to be known as the voice of arboriculture in Wisconsin. Our mission statement reads, "To improve the understanding of trees and the practice of arboriculture, and to promote high ethical standards." As an association, the WAA does an excellent job of educating our membership through its programs and networking opportunities.

One of our strategic goals is to promote public awareness and understanding of trees. One strategy the WAA is going to try this year, in order to promote public awareness of trees, is to separate the tree climbing championship from the summer workshop. The summer workshop will concentrate on educating our membership. The TCC /Public Field Day will concentrate on public awareness and education. On August 25th, at Warner Park in Madison, demonstrations and displays on proper planting, mulching, pruning, etc. will be set up and staffed by WAA members. The public will not only get to see proper techniques, but will be able to ask professional arborists tree-related questions they may have. This will be an excellent opportunity to clear up some of the tree myths we have been hearing about for years.

Meanwhile, the TCC will offer the public the opportunity to see an arborist in action. After watching the competition, any homeowner should be able to distinguish between a professional certified arborist and some guy with his name on the truck that specializes in tree removal and firewood.

There are two things you can do to help promote public awareness, which in turn promotes our profession. First, speak out. Get involved with the WAA and offer your expertise to the public on Aug 25th in Madison. We can always use help running the program, setting up displays, interpreting the climbing events to the public and judging the competitors. Second, speak up. Any time you hear a news story that you feel has been inaccurately reported, misquoted, or poorly covered, call the source and clarify our position for the profession, the industry, and the WAA.

As WAA members, it is up to us to Speak Up and Speak Out. If we do not, who will?

Mark Freberg, WAA President