



BARTLETT TO ESTABLISH MUSEUM OF ARBORICULTURE



Bartlett's vintage 1920s Ford Model T sprayer in the museum TCIA set up at TCI EXPO 2013 in Charlotte, above, and, at right, in earlier days.

By Don Blair, CTSP

Whether it is a sport such as baseball, a hobby or passion for something such as motorcycles or classic cars, a profession such as engineering or lawyering, or a trade such as welding and fabrication, you will invariably find some common traits of the professional: at least one association (usually more), certifications and accreditations, magazines devoted to the subject, conventions, trade shows, exhibitions, and/or competitions of one form or another. The tree care industry has all of these in abundance, but one thing many of the others have that we have been lacking is a museum. That is until recently.

The dream of a proper Museum of Arboriculture took its first steps toward reality last year at TCI EXPO in Charlotte, North Carolina. Culminating a year-long celebration of the 75th Anniversary of TCIA's founding (1938), the grand finale was a mini-museum exhibit on display at the Charlotte show. Well, maybe not

so mini. With exhibits, photos and displays spanning more than 100 years of tree care, this was the largest collection of tree care memorabilia ever assembled. (For more images of the museum, visit http://tcia.org/digital_magazine/tci-magazine/2014/01/index.html#?page=28)

When one stops to consider what was going to be involved in gathering so much "tree stuff" from all over the country; pulling it all together for the first time on show floor in the two or three days leading up to the show, and get it organized into a

two-and-a-half day museum exhibit 10 feet deep and over 200 feet long, it was truly remarkable that it turned out as well as it did. So what if it spilled over its boundaries a bit.

Although he didn't do it alone, the exhibits would certainly have turned out differently if David Lee, TCIA's membership director, hadn't stepped up to take command of the mission. Lee began to mine the contacts he has made over the years at arborist meetings all over the country in search of nuggets. If artifacts were nuggets, Lee discovered the mother lode. In the months leading up to M-Day, he would call me at least once a week to let me know that he had arranged for yet another truck, or had located and secured the display of rare, vintage equipment from EXPO vendors and arborists from around the country. We'll get into specifics later.

Jon Hickey is a well-respected, highly honored arborist serving Long Island. Some might say that he has the affliction of a hoarder; but the profession can thank him because over the course of a lifetime, Jon has been very



Senior VIP's Cleve Formwalt, from left, Pat Felix and a friend of Pat's were on hand to greet friends and reminisce about earlier times in TCIA history in the museum at TCI EXPO 2013 in Charlotte.

specific in his hoarding – tree equipment of just about all types and from all eras: ropes, saddles, saws, cavity tools, chisels, and even an extremely rare rubber cavity covering material. He also has boxes full of conference proceedings, trade magazines, news clippings, technical journals, and just about anything related to arboriculture that has been put down on paper.

In preparing this article, I had a chance to talk with Jon again regarding his passion for the profession and preservation of our heritage. Asked when he first started collecting “tree stuff,” he said he had started collecting from the very beginning of his career, which was almost 60 years ago! I asked Jon if he had any particularly favorite acquisitions in his collection. Like a proud father with a house full of children, he said that was a hard question. He just couldn’t single out one favorite over another. Because most of the equipment had come to him through friends with stories, he felt an attachment to almost everything he had become the steward of until such time as it could be housed in a proper museum.

Did we mention chain saws? Hickey has assembled a large collection of chain saws of all makes and models used in arboriculture dating back to 1942! Among them, one of the rarest – the first Homelite chain saw with a heavy, wooden storage chest and an extension cord. Extension cord? You bet, it was one of the earliest electric chain saws. Not surprisingly, it would only run on a special 240 volt Homelite generator!

Jon Hickey, left, visiting with Bill Heim.



Think about it. Homelite’s original reason for getting into business was to sell electric generators in rural areas so farmers and anyone in need could “light their home.” Some 70 years later electric outdoor power equipment is making a comeback – this time in the form of cordless power. What amazed the author was how modern looking this big, old relic looked. Especially when compared to their first gasoline model, which looked just as primitive (if not more so) than its brethren from the same era.

Almost everything Hickey has collected has a story attached to it. He said he got the electric Homelite and everything with it from a colleague, George Van Yahres Jr., who was getting ready to toss it out. George Van Yahres Sr. was one of the early 20th century arborists. He had helped advance the science of tree care, established a tree surgeons school and, in 1927,

wrote up an assessment of a huge tulip poplar at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. That report, pre-



Ben Tresselt and Andy Felix, behind, examine a scrapbook while other attendees enjoy the exhibits.

served for so many years in Monticello’s archives, proved invaluable to the author when he was retained by The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc. as a consulting arborist regarding that same tree 80 years later. (see “Moonlighting at Monticello,” *TCI Magazine*, November 2008) George’s son, Mitch eventually settled in Charlottesville, establishing Van Yahres Tree Experts, which is now in its third generation of family ownership.

In 1999, when the International Society of Arboriculture celebrated its 75th anniversary, Hickey and the author combined our readily transportable artifacts and set up a display at the original F. A. Bartlett labs in Stamford, Connecticut, the very place the ISA was originally founded. We had a lot of fun setting up and coveting each other’s collections, but what we did at TCI EXPO in 2013 was on so much larger a scale, involving so many more people, that it’s not really fair to make any sort of

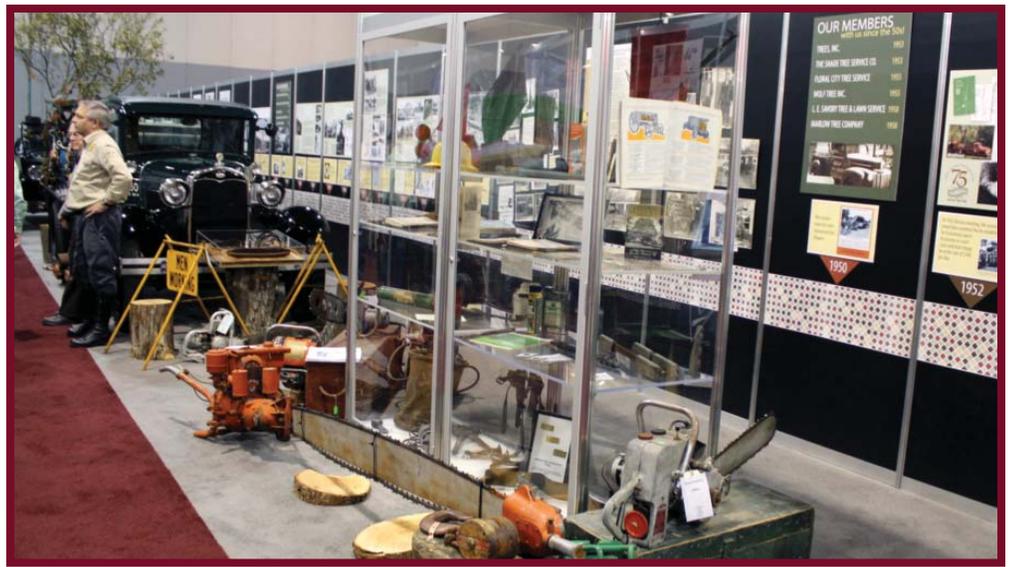


1959 Dodge Power Wagon. Wolf Tree Experts bought the truck new in 1959, and Tom Wolf restored it to show condition just in time for TCI EXPO 2013.

comparison. What we proved in 1999 was that arborists are very interested in our history, the average arborist knows very little about our history, and tree guys love engines, motors, and anything that makes noise regardless of the age or era. The “Hickey Collection” is remarkable in the depth and scope it represents to the profession of arboriculture.

A Museum of Arboriculture has been a particular passion of mine for over 30 years. When my father, Millard F. Blair, passed away in 1984, I became the curator of the “Blair Collection,” which has grown considerably in the ensuing decades. Sharing Hickey’s concerns for preservation, I’ve been looking for a permanent solution since 2003, when I found that I had to abandon my own plans for a museum, having gone so far as to actually having bought a building to house the museum shortly after my father’s passing.

Almost 50 years ago, in 1965, the F.A. Bartlett Tree Experts moved their labs from Stamford, Conn., to a 350-acre farm outside of Charlotte, N.C. Over the years, they have proceeded to build a state-of-the-art scientific laboratory and conference center, with lots of test plots on the grounds for long-term observation of various tree care practices, such as cabling and bracing, tree injection, and other insect and disease management practices. Robert A. Bartlett Jr., company chairman and CEO, has devoted passion, knowledge and resources to create one of the largest pri-



Artifacts in display case, a huge Mall Model No. 5 two-man chain saw in the foreground, and Tom Hutchins dressed in a vintage Davey Tree Expert Company uniform in front of their 1932 Model AA sprayer in the museum.

vately owned arboretums in the world featuring some of the largest collections of tree species.

Hickey had talked to Bartlett in recent years about the possibility of them acquiring his collection and incorporating it into a museum, to be built in the future. As it turns out, events sometimes create their own momentum. Because TCI EXPO was going to display arborist artifacts in Charlotte, 2013 seemed to be the ideal time to see if the Bartlett Foundation was willing and able to commit to the challenge of building a museum on their grounds. They were willing and able.

Bartlett acquired the Hickey collection,

which is expected to form the nucleus of the new Museum of Arboriculture. In talks with Robert Bartlett Jr. and Greg Daniels, retired Bartlett president and still a company Board member, a lot of planning has yet to be completed before any ground is broken.

“Our intention at this time is to construct a building that will chronicle the history of arboriculture in a way that clients, employees and visitors will understand and enjoy.” Daniels said in an email to the author this fall. “We are presently evaluating various locations on the grounds that will provide the best site for the building. The history of arboriculture will be integrated into our training programs as well. We are grateful for people like Jon Hickey and you for seeing the value in keeping the history of arboriculture alive with your collections.”

Having seen what Bartlett has done with their arboretum, labs and conference center, there is no doubt that The Museum of Arboriculture will be a world class facility when completed.

Donald F. Blair, CTSP, is owner of Sierra Moreno Mercantile, a TCIA associate member company located in Hagerstown, Maryland. This article was based loosely on his presentation, “Arboriculture Throughout History,” at TCI EXPO 2013 in Charlotte, N.C.



“Pogo” Sherwood, of Olney, Maryland, examines the display of small tools from the Blair and Hickey collections.

