

PARTNERSHIPS

PROMOTING MUNICIPAL TREE UTILIZATION

NEW JERSEY FORESTRY SERVICES

Ed Lempicki has fielded his share of telephone calls over a 27-year public-service career with the New Jersey Forestry Services, a branch of the State's Division of Parks and Forestry. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, he noticed an increase in the number of inquiries he received from municipal officials and tree service firms relating to municipal tree removal and disposal. In Lempicki's opinion, not only were the number of calls increasing, but the significance of the calls warranted further investigation. In 1991 he sought and received funding from the USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, for a project titled "Municipal Forest Products Marketing Service."

Statewide Survey Shows the Way

According to Lempicki, "The project enabled us to hire a full-time person who surveyed all 567 municipalities in the State to determine both their tree removal program and issues related to wood disposal." A major finding from the survey was that tree removal and disposal was a costly burden to many communities. "Our next effort," Lempicki recalls, "was to make one-on-one contact with municipalities with the greatest problems. We worked with them on numerous solutions including linking them with local sawmills and training them to market their better logs."

Concept Spreads Across the Country

As word spread about the New Jersey project, Lempicki was asked to speak at conferences and workshops throughout the country. During the 1990s he gave about 30 presentations on the topic of marketing sawlogs from street tree removals. His enthusiasm for the subject spurred many of his State and Federal forestry colleagues to promote the municipal tree utilization message on a national basis.

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Assistance with using a metal detector was provided to interested communities through the Municipal Forest Products Marketing Service project. Photo by Ed Cesa

Partnerships—The Key to Success

As a State forest products utilization and marketing specialist, Lempicki appreciated the value of partnerships when initiating the program in New Jersey. “The funding from the USDA Forest Service was critical to the effort,” he explains. “The Federal grant enabled New Jersey to take the idea to the ‘action’ level.”

Ed Cesa, utilization and marketing specialist with the USDA Forest Service in Morgantown, West Virginia, agrees with Lempicki on the value of partnerships. Cesa notes, “An established Federal-State partnership was in place, which helped make the New Jersey project a success.”

Due to the positive feedback on the project, Cesa approached Lempicki with the idea of developing a “How to” guide on the topic. “We took many of the principles we learned from the project and wrote ‘Recycling Municipal Trees: a Guide for Marketing Sawlogs from Street Tree Removals in Municipalities’ ” (Cesa and others 1994). The publication was a national success, and in conjunction with the one-on-one technical assistance to municipalities and the group workshops and seminars, earned the Federal-State team the 1995 Technology Transfer Award from the USDA Forest Service.

Another valuable partnership that Lempicki cultivated over the years is one with Rutgers University. He teaches a municipal tree utilization module at the annual Rutgers-sponsored Shortcourse on Urban and Community Forestry. This effort led to both Lempicki and Cesa being asked to contribute a chapter on municipal tree utilization in the 1999 publication, "Handbook of Urban and Community Forestry in the Northeast." In addition, a publication detailing the economics and yield of urban sawlogs manufactured in New Jersey is being developed as a cooperative State and Federal effort.

Lempicki has also developed successful partnerships with the New Jersey Bureau of Recycling and the New Jersey Office of Sustainability. The latter provided a low interest loan for equipment to an entrepreneur selling third-party certified lumber manufactured from urban logs. The entrepreneur has found markets for the "rediscovered" certified wood among architects and other high-end outlets. Lempicki points to this example as just one of the success stories he has witnessed since the original project started in 1991.



Free-form furniture, such as this walnut coffee table, was crafted from street trees. Reprinted from Cesa and others 1994, p. 29

Practicing What They Preach

In 1999 the New Jersey Forestry Services purchased a portable sawmill that is housed at the Division's Forestry Education Center. In addition to being used for education purposes with school groups and tree service firms, the mill produces lumber for Division use, such as picnic tables, landscape ties, and paneling. Lempicki proudly notes, "Our mill saws only urban logs. We practice what we preach."

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SEEING THE BIG PICTURE OF URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT

*URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM
STATE OF CALIFORNIA*

As the State Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator for California since 1992, Eric Oldar has spoken to thousands of people about the benefits of trees and forests to municipalities. One of Oldar's repeated messages is "Trees in a community should be seen as an asset, not just an aesthetic amenity." He strives to get people to think of the urban forest as a "sustainable system." One of his notions regarding "trees as assets" and "sustainability" focuses on the utilization of urban trees for traditional wood products. Over a period of 8 years, Oldar developed a network of partners across California to help him realize his dream.

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Starting a Utilization Program

In 1996 Oldar convinced his superiors in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to purchase a portable sawmill and lumber dryer. The Wood-Mizer mill was loaned to the city of Lompoc, which used it to convert municipal trees into lumber products (see p. 23). The EBAC lumber dryer was mounted on a mobile trailer and loaned to Pacific Coast Lumber in San Luis Obispo, which was willing to partner with CDF in sawing urban logs and drying the lumber (see p. 77).

Expanding the Utilization Program

Following the success of the initial demonstrations, Oldar expanded the program by arranging for CDF to purchase four additional portable mills. CDF is partnering with the California Integrated Waste Management Board to construct a fleet of portable dehumidification dry kilns to be used in conjunction with the mills. According to Oldar, "It would be difficult to do this alone. Our demonstration project partners and our funding partners are very important to our success."



This holding site is one of many municipal log yards where portable sawmills and lumber dryers will convert “waste” into “asset.” Photo by Eric Oldar

Numerous Partnerships Enhance the Program

In addition to demonstration projects, Oldar has led CDF in partnerships with the California Urban Forest Council (CUFC) in San Diego and with Pierce College in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles to jointly host workshops on value-added products from urban trees. He has been instrumental in organizing an Urban Forest Academy for municipal arborists where the “assets” philosophy of seeing the big picture of urban forests is taught. Knowing that education will play a key role in this new vision, CDF has entered yet another partnership with a school of fine woodworking-Palomar College in San Marcos, California. Students and faculty alike are exploring the new world of urban “working forests,” where wood that was once treated as just tree waste is being converted to high quality value-added products made of exotic urban hardwoods. Additional workshops focusing on woodworkers are being investigated through a collaborative project with the University of California’s Forest Products Laboratory in Richmond.



Workshops and mill tours create awareness and interest in municipal tree utilization. Photo by Eric Oldar



Partnerships between the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, private industry, and educational and non-profit organizations have inspired woodworkers to use municipal trees for value-added products. Photo by Eric Oldar

Oldar has also teamed with faculty at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) to produce three publications on the topics of sustainability in urban forestry, urban tree volume equations for urban hardwoods, and urban wood utilization. The last publication is a 218-page document providing detailed information on the size, use, and potential of utilizing California's urban forest resource. Future cooperative projects with Cal Poly include development of (1) an internet-based commodity exchange for exotic woods from the urban environment, (2) commodity standards for figure (grain pattern) in urban wood in lieu of standard hardwood grades, and (3) cubic foot wood volume tables to be used in conjunction with automated city tree inventories.

Seeing the Big Picture

Regardless of the audience or partner that he is networking with, Oldar continues to stress what he calls the "big picture" of urban forest management. "Planting trees and engaging people are important, but sometimes we don't see the forest for the trees. We need to understand the urban wood waste management stream, which includes managing trees for age and species diversity and value-added wood products."

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CONNECTING TREE OWNERS WITH WOODWORKERS

*HARVESTING URBAN TIMBER PROGRAM,
CINCINNATI, OHIO*

During the day, Sam Sherrill teaches economics, statistics, and computer graphics at the University of Cincinnati. During evenings and weekends, he is an amateur woodworker who has crafted handmade furniture for the past 20 years. Like most woodworkers, he typically had purchased lumber for his projects from retail outlets. An incident in the mid-1990s, however, changed Sherrill's woodworking philosophy and led to a program that is spreading far beyond the boundaries of Cincinnati.

Fallen Tree Leads to New Program

In 1995, a University colleague of Sherrill's spotted a fallen cherry tree along a street in Cincinnati. The colleague asked Sherrill if the downed tree had any value. Sherrill was not sure so he started to investigate the possibilities. Much to his surprise, he "discovered" portable sawmills and learned they could be used to mill urban trees into high quality lumber. Since woodworkers are always in need of good lumber at reasonable prices, Sherrill decided to pursue the notion of recovering lumber from municipal trees. He and his colleague implemented a pilot project in the City of Cincinnati. The effort was initially named the Trees to Furniture program; it is now known as Harvesting Urban Timber.

Partnerships Boost Program

Supporters stepped forward to help. "Popular Woodworking" magazine assisted in sponsorship of the program by promoting it in their national publication. Wood-Mizer Products, Inc. donated one of their portable sawmills to help serve as the workhorse for the pilot project. The Cincinnati Park Board assisted by cutting selected logs into proper lengths and loading them onto trucks. Local newspapers ran articles about

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Sherrill's efforts to convert downed urban trees into lumber for woodworkers and into furniture. According to Sherrill, "The partnerships we formed really gave us a big boost in getting the program off the ground. We received support and exposure that tapped a latent sentiment in the public."

"Popular Woodworking," Wood-Mizer, and Sherrill and his colleague developed an educational brochure describing the Cincinnati program. The brochure is used by communities and groups to develop similar programs around the country. It also gives tips on topics such as tree selection and calculating board footage.

Sherrill says, "One of the objectives of the program is to hook up like-minded woodworkers across the country to keep downed trees out of the landfill and provide lumber for projects." This objective is being met, in part, by the creation of similar projects in other cities, such as Hammond and Indianapolis, Indiana. On an informal basis, numerous woodworkers have been directly connected with tree owners who want to have their tree converted into a long-lasting product rather than end up in the landfill.

Family Tree Showcases Program

To illustrate the benefits of the Harvesting Urban Timber program, Sherrill highlights the story of a fallen bur oak tree that had been a silent participant in gatherings and events on a family farm since 1849. He says, "The blown-over tree, estimated to be 500 years old, had a trunk diameter of 10 feet with some of the limbs 3 to 4 feet across. It had sentimental value for the family. They commissioned me to make some furniture from it, starting with a 9-foot trestle table." He completed the table with boards sawn from the tree's limbs in time for the family to have its traditional Thanksgiving meal on it at the family farm. To date, Sherrill and his son have made 15 pieces of furniture from the tree, including three children's rocking horses. Sherrill adds, "I am creating something of great personal value for this family from a tree that was a sapling about the time Columbus set sail for the New World."

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Since this 500-year-old bur oak was blown over, its sentimental value has been preserved in the making of numerous furniture pieces, including a family dining table. Top, Gatch family photo, circa 1860. Bottom photo by Sam Sherrill



Reference

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