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Tending to Decatur's Treasury of Trees

More Than Just a Job at Arborguard

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Local Artists
Restaurant
Spotlight





The Art of Urban Forestry

“When I’m at a street-side table in a downtown Decatur restaurant, I look up and see the tree canopy. I can’t describe the tremendous difference it makes,” says Spence Rosenfeld, president and owner of Arboguard Tree Specialists. “And it didn’t happen by accident. The average lifespan of an urban tree is only three to five years. Trees need our help to survive, and many people don’t realize that. Decatur’s a great example of responsible tree care. These trees are vital to the quality of life we enjoy here.”

Since Rosenfeld founded the company 26 years ago, Arboguard has worked to preserve the existing canopy of Atlanta’s trees and plant new ones. Clients include the City of Decatur, Emory University, Agnes Scott College, Post Properties,



UPS, homeowners, and others. Arborguard serves residential, commercial, construction, golf course and governmental clients. They provide tree care and preservation, tree removal, plant health-care services including a proprietary soil therapy mix, consulting and maintenance pruning. “Arborguard is tailored to urban forestry,” says Rosenfeld, a Decatur resident himself.

“Urban trees are growing in an absolutely hostile environment. It’s so unlike the forest setting where trees evolved over millions of years. Trees are among the oldest living things. But on streets, in cities, in high-impact urban areas, they don’t automatically

get what they need, and with the cycles of drought and then excess rain, the effect is compounded. Health care for trees is an important part of our business.”

Arborguard’s tagline, “For people who love trees,” gets at the heart of the company’s philosophy. The company has earned its reputation as the industry leader by its focus on conservation and education. “It’s not as simple as giving a quote for tree removal. Our certified arborists are trained to ask questions and look at all the possibilities; often the tree can be saved. What we recommend might be different from what the customer expects.”

Many companies claim to be environmentally responsible, but Arborguard has a record few can match. The company leases seven Toyota Prius hybrid vehicles—“eco-friendly arbor cars”—to get 60 miles per gallon on fuel. (They rode in the Inman Park Festival parade this year.) The company also recycles all its wood products and has added a new specialized plant health-care truck that holds tanks of water to mix only as much product as needed on site and eliminate daily leftovers.



“Arborguard has provided tree care, including pruning, fertilization and maintenance for the trees in the historic Decatur Cemetery and similar services for the trees planted in downtown Decatur as part of Decatur’s streetscape program for many years.”

—Hugh Saxon, city manager of Decatur



Spence Rosenfeld

Arboguard worked with Woodlands Garden, off Scott Boulevard near Clairemont, in a memorable project using horses to drag out dead trees. “It was an old-fashioned solution and we were very pleased to avoid damaging healthy trees with heavy machinery. It was quite a sight!” relates Rosenfeld.

Rosenfeld admits his life-long love of trees began early. When he was 9, his family moved to a two-and-a-half acre lot in Pennsylvania located on former farmland. He recalls planting an astounding 300 trees with his father. Playing beneath them and watching them grow over the next nine years made a lasting impression. He went on to earn his Masters from Duke University’s School of Forestry.

Now, Arboguard employs more than 50 people and has opened branches in Charlotte, N.C. and Augusta, Ga. Honors from various arborist, park and trade associations crowd the wall of the company’s



Arboguard’s community involvements are numerous. Rosenfeld partnered with the Druid Hills Civic Association to form “Tree Watch” in conjunction with Trees Atlanta. “Giant trees were falling each year, and in the course of 20 years at that rate, the mature canopy would have disappeared. Under our guidance, volunteers planted over 350 trees, at wholesale cost, over a five-year time frame. We were shocked at the positive response. We’d love to use it as a model for future similar programs for Decatur and other in-town neighborhoods.”

Inman Park engaged in a similar effort. “We provided them with a computerized tree inventory, an overall picture of what’s happening and what will happen. They’ve since become a designated arboretum and fund the maintenance of their trees located between the sidewalk and street through the popular, annual Tree Huggers Ball,” Rosenfeld adds.

Avondale Estates office, where their headquarters have been located for 26 years. But Rosenfeld prefers to focus on the work the company does.

And he always comes back to the trees. “You can replace a car, even a building, but for all the money in the world you can’t replace a mature tree. It takes time, generations.”

“We unintentionally take trees for granted. They look big, they look strong. But trees in an urban environment need our help. They are incredibly beautiful, but have the potential to become dangerous when not properly cared for. Taking care of trees is becoming an urban necessity rather than a luxury.”

Susan Hunsinger is a local freelance writer.

For more information call 404.299.5555.