

RCA Perspectives

Since its inception in the late '90s, hundreds of individuals have dedicated the time and resources required to earn the highest professional designation for arborists—the Registered Consulting Arborist®. To find out more about why ASCA Members value this designation so much, and what it means to their consulting practice, we interviewed two RCAs—one of the earliest who is still active in his consulting practice, Ellis N. Allen, RCA #139, and one of ASCA's newest RCAs, Andrew J. White, RCA #510.

Ellis, as one of our earliest Registered Consulting Arborists, can you describe what it was like—back when you first joined ASCA.

Back in the early '70s, shortly after ASCA started, I was asked to join by Spence Davis. At that time the ASCA meetings consisted of a one-day meeting prior to the National Arborist Association (TCIA) annual meeting. I was still struggling with my tree business and didn't feel like I could monetarily afford to join ASCA, or to give up the time from my work to attend longer than the NAA meeting. Finally after talking with some of the other members of ASCA, and with more prodding from Spence, I did join in 1975.

After that time I attended most all of ASCA's meetings and eventually they became a stand alone organization, separate from NAA. At that early time a prospective member had to be recommended

or proposed by a member in good standing in order to be considered for membership in ASCA.

Andy, as one of ASCA's newest RCAs, can you give us some insight into why and how you became involved with ASCA?

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in plants, animals, and building things. I had my own garden before I was old enough to attend grade school. I was raising and racing homing pigeons on my own while still in middle school. My construction skills were well honed by the time I entered high school. My graduate studies focused on plant ecology, specifically plant-animal interactions. For the past 30+ years, I have owned businesses that have focused primarily on designing and building outdoor living areas and gardens. Trees as a group of plants have always held special interest to me.

Early in my career (about 30+ years ago), I met L.C. Chadwick at the Ohio Nurseryman's Short Course in Columbus, Ohio. We discussed arboricultural consultation as a profession. This was when the profession was just starting to get properly organized. Tree appraisals were just beginning to be taken seriously at that time. Back then, I was very interested in the profession, but did not feel I was properly qualified to join, nor did I think I could properly support myself and family as a Consulting Arborist. However, it has always been in the back

of my mind to take another look at the profession as I approached the logical conclusion of my contracting career. For that reason, I have always kept a close eye on the profession.

Several years ago, I came to the realization that my diminishing physical abilities were screaming at me to begin to start winding down the physically demanding contracting part of my career, and start expanding the more cerebral design and consulting parts of my career. I am beginning the career transition process now. I have always had the desire to work as long as I am physically and mentally able, and I feel I should be able to design landscapes and consult for as long as my mind is still functioning at a reasonably high level. Over the past few years, I have tried to fill any gaps in my credentials / knowledge that might limit me as a designer and consultant. One of my certification / registration deficiencies was in the area of arboricultural consultation, and it was for this reason that I pursued the RCA status. Unlike thirty years ago, I finally felt I was now qualified to be an RCA and that I had something worthwhile to offer the public and the profession. I still have some doubts about my earning power as an RCA, but feel that the design work will be a good complement and supplement to my RCA practice. My financial needs are not what they once were.

Andy, what made you then decide to become a Registered Member rather than continuing your status as Member or even non-member?

RCA Perspectives *continued*

Throughout my education and career, I have always tried to achieve the highest levels possible. Once I made the decision to enter the field of arboricultural consultation, I knew I wanted to achieve the highest status possible, and that is RCA status. Becoming an RCA has been my goal since joining ASCA.

What type of clients or assignments does each of you get most frequently?

Andy: Since I am still very much involved in designing and building landscapes and outdoor living areas, most of my consulting work comes from these clients and projects, and it probably always will. Because of my role as a Landscape Contractor and Licensed General Building Contractor, much of my work necessarily deals with pre- and post-construction impact on existing trees. Proper tree selection, establishment, and maintenance are also a big part of my practice. Evaluating hazardous trees is important and I plan to do more of this in the future. Working with developers, builders, architects and property owners to properly develop building sites is an area of practice I want to get more involved in; my background is well suited for this.

Ellis: The type of client that I most often seem to get is ones who have had trees removed from their property by others without permission. Also I have had clients that inadvertently removed trees from neighbors without intending to invade their property. In other words, they didn't know where the property line was of their own property.

I also have cases where there is injury from failing trees both for the plaintiff and the defense. It is necessary to determine if the tree had been in a hazardous condition and if it was known to have been in a hazardous condition prior to the incident.

Andy, what are some of the biggest changes you have seen in your practice since beginning pursuit of your RCA designation?

In the past year, I joined ASCA, attended the Consulting Academy, and became an RCA. This was done while running an existing business during difficult economic times and pursuing other career objectives. There has not been any time for changes in my practice; my formal RCA practice is just beginning.

Can you each name a significant opportunity and a significant challenge you see ahead for ASCA and for you as a practicing RCA?

Ellis: The biggest benefits that I have seen in recent years are the increase of educational material at the annual meetings and the increased quality of those materials. The biggest challenge for the Consulting Arborist will be to keep up with the latest techniques of diagnosis of trees and their care. It will always be necessary to keep informed of court cases and how we can best present our side of the story if it goes to court. It will be necessary to keep abreast of new and better ways to treat plants so as to provide the best information for the client.

Andy: The challenges and opportunities are basically the same as they always have been. The challenge for a practicing RCA is to provide a worthwhile service and be adequately compensated for the effort. Attaining the highest degree of professionalism is critical for establishing and maintaining credibility, both individually as an RCA and as an organization such as ASCA. ASCA and its members need to continue to work together to further the profession. Consulting Arborists have the opportunity to make significant improvements in the quality and safety of the environment—not everyone has that opportunity! 🌱

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[continued on page 18]