

# General Manager's Message

By Tom Shotzbarger

We do not enjoy hurricanes or storms. The damage they do to trees and landscapes is significant, costly and bothersome. The cost of human life and the affect it has on survivors is the worst aspect of such a storm. The sudden surge of hazardous work for our crews, usually in unsafe conditions, takes a toll on our crews. Safety is stressed but it is difficult to ignore the pressure of attending to so many of our clients' urgent needs. As a service organization, we truly want to satisfy the requests of our clients and prospects. Unfortunately, it is physically not possible during such an event as a hurricane. We take the calls and attempt to respond to them as they are received, but there is a need for prioritization of hazardous conditions. Those who are closed-off by trees on driveways or other true catastrophes take priority over cleanup requests.

One of the worst aspects of storm damage is what it does to the trees and landscape plantings. If given a choice, we would always rather perform routine maintenance than repair damaged landscapes. Often, damaged trees are not salvageable and we find ourselves in a dual role of arborist/psychologist attempting to explain some obscure point of arboricultural physiology, and remaining sensitive to the expressed needs of the client who may be attached to the tree.

A particularly challenging situation is to explain and justify the removal of leaning or toppled trees, especially if it holds significance for the property owner. Hurricane Isabel caused serious problems for Plum, Pear and Willow trees. Many of them were blown over and we are being asked to straighten them up again. Our standard recommendation for the removal of leaning or toppled trees comes from years of experience and research. If a tree has failed, it is a direct indication that the root system was underdeveloped or malformed. The wind and saturated soils only contributed to topple an otherwise healthy-appearing tree. The true problem was the weak root system, unable to adequately support the weight of the tree. Research has shown that artificially securing a fallen or leaning tree by installing a stake or guy system creates an ongoing need to keep the tree secured. The securing devices become inadequate as the tree grows and adds height, spread and weight. Since the root system rarely recovers sufficiently enough to support the tree, the hazardous condition increases and eventual failure becomes inevitable. It is better to spend resources to remove the fallen or leaning tree, and replace it with a new tree that has an opportunity to add value to the landscape.



## Meet our "Director of First Impressions" Crystal Grove

Crystal is usually the first person that will greet you when you contact Tomlinson Bomberger. Crystal answers our phones, greets our visitors, and assists with notifying customers when services need to be scheduled. Her friendly nature and constant smile put people at ease when they call or visit Tomlinson Bomberger.

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# NEWS *You Can Use*

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## Mulch Volcanoes, Have You Seen Them?

By Don Becker

Over the past several years, the excessive mulching of newly planted and existing trees and shrubs has become an epidemic. The pushing up of mulch around the trunks of trees and shrubs like a volcano is causing many problems. Mulch volcanoes may protect trees and shrubs from string trimmers and lawn mowers, but these cones of mulch are affecting the health of trees and shrubs in an adverse way. It is better to mulch out rather than mulch up. Enlarging beds to create wider circles is far more beneficial than adding mulch to create higher mounds.

Mulch pushed up against the trunks of trees and shrubs creates a high moisture level against the trunk that can cause fungal canker disease or rots. These cankers can slowly spread around the trunks allowing other diseases and insects to damage the trunks. This scenario can eventually kill the trees and shrubs. Rodents may also find refuge in the highly piled mulch.

Another problem with mulch on the trunks is the formation of adventitious roots that grow out into the mulch and cause a thick mat of roots that grow



over the main roots. They may cause girdling roots that circle the tree and choke off the flow of water and nutrients to the tree.

And finally, even though mulch volcanoes keep the area next to the trunk moist, sometimes the opposite happens. A thick application of mulch inhibits rainfall and irrigation from percolating into the soil where the roots are growing.

If the large mound keeps the root zone dry, roots will die and the tree will become stressed. Water does not penetrate through tightly packed

mounds of mulch. It just runs off the top of the mound and the plants receive little water.

For the best results, mulch with a 2-3" layer and keep mulch away from the trunks. The flare at the bottom of the tree or shrub, just above the roots, should be visible after the mulch is applied. If you already have a thick layer of mulch

greater than 4 inches, remove the excess and cultivate the rest. You may also consider removing all of the old mulch and start over with new mulch. An important maintenance practice is to periodically cultivate your mulch beds to allow for water and air movement into the soil and the decay of the existing mulch.

Remember, mulch out not up; more is not better if it exceeds 3 inches; and keep it away from the trunks of trees and shrubs.

**HAPPY MULCHING!**

## Renewal Process & Proposals for 2004

We've made significant improvements with our software this year which will allow us to prepare for 2004 earlier than past years. About the middle of December, you should expect to receive information in the mail about the services that are being proposed for 2004, or those services which will be automatically renewed for 2004. Please review this information carefully. If you have any questions, call our office or e-mail us at [support@tbl.com](mailto:support@tbl.com).

Check out our redesigned & upgraded web site @ [www.tbl.com](http://www.tbl.com)