

Traveling Trees can form leafy bower anywhere

By LAURA RICKETSON

NARRAGANSETT - Tom Fuimarello knows his trees. He knows which species are found in Rhode Island, how tall and wide they grow and what uses they have.

He also knows how to move them. Instead of chopping down trees to make way for new developments, Fuimarello, a Narragansett resident, has made a living out of moving them. "I guess you could say my business is politically correct," he said.

With his spade truck, bearing a hydraulic arm that looks like a claw, Fuimarello scoops up trees too big to hug, and moves them and their roots to their next home.

Traveling Trees has been transporting oaks, maples, birches, evergreens, pines and other kinds of trees for three years in Rhode Island, and parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Fuimarello, owner and creator of this unique business, got the idea from a friend in New York, who moves trees for the state's rich and famous.

Fuimarello moved to Rhode Island 20 years ago. Three years ago, he bought a street-sweeping business from a friend. In his spare time, Fuimarello would bounce from Rhode Island to New York, and back again, helping his friend with his tree moving business.

Fuimarello eventually decided it would be an interesting business venture, and began researching the industry in the Ocean State. With only one other person in the state in the business of moving trees, Fuimarello jumped in.

The first year, Fuimarello did most of his business in the spring, while maintaining his street-sweeping business. He eventually sold it and focused all of his energy on Traveling Trees.

Business grew steadily the next year, when Fuimarello got calls for transplanting trees in the fall and spring.

"That's the ideal time to transplant trees," he said. Winter is the best time to move deciduous, or leafy trees, he added.



Usually Fuimarello begins moving trees in early spring.

"We started late this year because March was pretty nasty," he said. His two spade trucks, one a 90, which digs a 90-inch root ball, and the other a 50, which digs a smaller, 50-inch root ball, can push through a few inches of frozen soil to remove the trees.

"It's got quite a lot of force," he said. "The problem is the frost."

But Fuimarello is always busy, even if the weather is bad.

"If I'm not moving trees, I'm looking at them," he said.

When Fuimarello moves a tree, he's actually leaving 90 percent of the root system behind.

"It can still survive with the proper care," he assured. Fuimarello's equipment is designed to extract the most important parts of the root system, those that are essential in sustaining the tree, even through a transplant.

"I make sure I get the fibrous ones," he said.

Traveling Trees moves all sizes and shapes of trees. Just how big?

While it depends on the type of tree and the weather, Fuimarello's business card boasts that his trucks can handle up to a 40-foot-tall and 12-inch caliper trees.

For sake of reference, Fuimarello said many of the trees on Main Street in Wakefield are 3 or 4-inch caliper trees.

"I just moved a 44-foot-tall one this

spring, so I guess my business card is wrong," he said with a chuckle.

Fuimarello may be one of two men in the state with a tree moving business, but the idea isn't his alone.

"It's big in New York, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts and there's a few on Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard," he said. The idea is slowly catching on here, too.

"I get a lot of work when people see my truck," Fuimarello said. "The biggest thing is the awareness that it can be done."

It can be done, but at a price that Fuimarello said scares many people away from the prospect.

The two trucks Fuimarello uses are expensive, and "all they do is pick up trees."

An average truck with a spade costs anywhere from \$125,000 to \$175,000. The spade alone costs from \$75-\$80,000, he said.

Average fee for half a day for the large truck is \$800. It can cost up to \$1600 for a full day.

For the smaller truck, it costs \$700 for half a day, \$1,200 for a full day.

"Sometimes it can cost anywhere from \$400 to \$3,000 to move one tree," Fuimarello said.

The variables include the type of tree, how scarce it is in the immediate area, how far it must be transported and how big it is.

Once, he drove to New Jersey to find and transport a specific tree to

continued...

Connecticut for a memorial.

"There's not a lot of work close to home," he said. "South County Commons was luck," he said, referring to the mixed-use development to be built on Route 1. Fuimarello is moving a large number of trees on the property to create a buffer by the road.

Traveling Trees does much of its business in East Greenwich, Newport, Saybrook, Connecticut, Jamestown and even some jobs on Ocean Road in Narragansett.

One of the difficult aspects of the job, he said, is that most people want mature trees; they don't want to wait for one to grow.

"I'm also in the business of instant gratification," he laughed. "People

want a tree now. They don't want to wait."

In order to supply his customers with the best adult trees, Fuimarello is "in with all the nurseries in Rhode Island."

People also contact him if they have an old tree they want to get rid of to make an addition or other structure on their property.

Fuimarello said he is looking to expand his business and purchase farmland to keep a kind of nursery for mature trees.

He also wants to have at least 25 different species that are commonly found in Rhode Island, such as blue spruce, birches, maples, Douglas firs, and beech trees.

Fuimarello said he gets a lot of calls from feuding neighbors who want trees put up between properties. Some people also like to transplant trees with sentimental value, if they move.

There are other customers who want shade, and a few who want a tree replaced if a car hits and knocks one over. Insurance pays for that, he said.

Despite the different uses for trees, Fuimarello said no one has called him wanting cleaner air or an increased property value - two proven benefits of having mature trees on property.

"People still don't appreciate trees," he said.

If you are interested in having a tree moved, call Traveling Trees at 788-9988.