

CLIMBERS' CORNER

Cut From the Same Cloth

By Glenn Peroni

On a clear, crisp Florida winter day over 70°, rescue and arboriculture professionals gathered to discuss the cutting edge of aerial rescue in the arboriculture worksite. Four different fire departments responded to an offer by North American Training Solutions (NATS) to join arborists in a collaborative effort to preplan and discuss aerial rescues. Arborists from 11 states and 3 countries had gathered in the town of Windermere to prepare for a tree climbing competition the following day. Event organizer Scotty Olsen prepared a worthwhile day of training for these volunteers.

The goal of the day was to bring professional rescue technicians and arborists together to learn how we can change the efficiency and effectiveness of the emergency response to the arboriculture worksite.

Technical rope rescue in the fire service often focuses on scenarios based on fixed structures such as buildings and towers. Although tree-related emergencies constitute a small percentage of the calls for fire department personnel, the dynamics of these emergency scenes demand education, preparation, and cooperation. At the Florida event, the firefighters quickly realized that tree-related emergencies can challenge the best techniques and resources usually reserved for fixed structures. Many rescue professionals have considered tree-related rescues; however, the modern arborist uses tools and techniques many rescue professionals are not familiar with.

On a day with perfect conditions for climbing, NATS instructors Bruce Smith and Glenn Peroni were thrilled to help the rescue technicians expand their vision to include tools and techniques for working in trees. Throughout the day, the professional rescuers responded with enthusiasm.

"I am totally amazed at the level of professionalism and equipment you (the modern arborist) have here," one rescuer said. He and his colleagues participated in many discussions about different ways the two professions can work together. Specific topics of discussion included anchor points, means of accessing and treating the victim, harnesses and saddles, equipment ratings set by the NFPA (National Fire Protection Association, a governing body for the fire

service), and incident command to name a few. There was a distinctly cooperative atmosphere as each scenario and discussion led to eye-opening moments for both the technical rescuers and the arborists. One such moment came when the scenario presented a victim unable to help himself and was out of reach for fire service ladders or apparatuses. The firefighters watched closely as techniques were shown that would allow them to safely ascend beyond the reach of ground and aerial ladders.

Every participant was challenged to review their practices based on what they learned on this day. For the arborists, many important tools were added to their mental toolbox. Perhaps the brightest point made was that this was not competitive aerial rescue. In a tree climbing competition, arborists perform an aerial rescue as a timed event. On this day it became clear, as the practical scenarios unfolded, that during a worksite emergency time is not king. A successful rescue follows a planned, methodical, and cooperative effort to produce the best outcome for victim(s) and rescuer(s).

Another practice used in the fire service that would serve the arborist well is "preplanning," in which firefighters plan what they would do for certain scenarios. Preplanning can be very specific, such as having the phone numbers and dialogue with specialized equipment operators and suppliers for an emergency involving a collapse. It can also be generalized to include an emergency action plan and employee emergency information for any scenario.

"When I arrive on a scene like this," one firefighter commented, while observing the second live scenario, "I will look for the arborist to be the specialist (knowing their crew, their equipment and the trees) so that we can work together for the best outcome of all involved." His statement is an encouragement to all arborists to step up their emergency training and preparations, to be available if called upon.

Glenn Peroni challenged each arborist to begin their preparations by visiting their local fire departments: "Stop by the fire station and begin a conversation. Once they find out that you are a professional arborist and interested in what they do as professional rescuers, both of you will be better prepared."

The goal of the day was to bring professional rescue technicians and arborists together to learn from each other how we can change the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency response in the arboriculture worksite. This goal was not only reached, it was surpassed.

The level of communication and camaraderie was so well appreciated that many new friendships and contacts were established among attendees. After all, if it weren't for slight changes in their past, either one could be in the other's profession. Adrenaline, challenge, servitude, and hard work are common threads in both professions. At the end of the day, all present were better prepared to perform and were proud to agree that we are, as one firefighter stated, "Cut from the same cloth."

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A diverse group of professional tree care specialists and professional fire and rescue response technicians listen intently.