

This article
brought to you by:

TimesDispatch.com

Richmond Times-Dispatch



NEW: Get [Movie Showtimes](#) in Entertainment

Entrepreneur goes out on a limb

24-year-old arborist takes a 'different approach' to tree management and plant care

BY DOUG CHILDERS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Monday, September 18, 2006



Billy Davis, 24, owner of Arborscapes tree care, stands in the middle of Irene and Bill Cimino's newly landscaped back yard. Andy Mason, plant health care manager for the company, stands in back. EVA RUSSO/TIMES-DISPATCH

Billy Davis has been in his chosen line of work longer than most other 24-year-old business owners.

He started his first company -- a lawn-mowing business -- with his best friend when he was 12. They called the company "The Lawn Boyz."

"We started off pushing and pulling the lawn mowers around the neighborhood with our bikes," Davis said. "Then we bought lawn tractors and trailers to pull our equipment around. I was about 14 when we started dealing with the trees, pruning limbs and removing smaller trees."

Aside from wanting as a youngster "to be in the Coast Guard or police force," Davis knew early on that he wanted to work with trees for a living. During his junior and senior years at James River High School, he studied landscape and greenhouse management at the Chesterfield Technical Center.

He continued his education at Virginia Tech, where he earned an associate degree in landscape and turf management. After graduating and briefly running a national company's tree division in Maryland, Davis launched his own company, Arborscapes LLC, in 2002. It is the first business he has owned as an adult.

"Our main service is tree management and plant health care," Davis said. "We do everything from cradle to grave, but we try to focus on preserving the trees and plants.

"In the grand scheme of things, removing trees does not take a great deal of knowledge, but when you're taking care of trees -- with proper climbing, making proper cuts and making the best decisions to care for the trees -- that's a different story."

With two employees and four trucks, Davis said the Midlothian-based company gets enough work for two crews and currently has a five-week backlog.

"I am usually at the shop around 6:15 a.m., and the trucks are on the road between 6:30 and 7. When we get to the job site, we will generally walk through everything that needs to be done. Depending on the day, I will either leave and let Andy Mason, my right-hand man, take over so that I can go and meet with clients and do all of the other behind-the-scenes work. Or I will be right there, climbing the trees, dragging brush, loading logs -- just working with the guys."

Davis met Mason when the two were students at the Chesterfield Technical Center, and they were roommates at Virginia Tech. Like Davis, Mason is a certified arborist. He joined Davis' company 18 months ago.

In Davis' opinion, he isn't in the sales business. He is in the education business, and he said educating customers about "how the tree is going to respond to what we're going to do" and "going over why I would disagree with other companies' suggestions" for dealing with a tree are the most satisfying parts of his job.

"We take such a different approach to tree care than most people, and to be able to convince somebody that you will take care of their trees and plants as if they were your own and to build that trust and partnership with the client" is important, he said.

"You can be in this industry to make money or because you're passionate about it. There is an in-between, but money's not driving me. It's the passion."

Irene Cimino and her husband, Bill, have seen up-close Davis' attention to detail and his willingness to suggest alternative approaches to tree care. After a storm damaged a large pine on their Stonewall Court property in January, they asked Davis to cut it down. After examining the tree, Davis and his crew recommended a less-aggressive pruning strategy.

He had worse news for a large sugar maple on their property. A previous addition to the house had damaged the tree's root system and hastened the decaying process, Davis told her, and he advised the couple to cut it down.

Davis' advice was sound and sincere, Cimino said, and after the crew performed the work, Cimino and her husband asked Davis to redo their entire landscape.

On Davis' recommendation, the Ciminis hired a landscape designer, and Davis used the designer's plans to relandscape the Ciminis' front and back yards.

"They removed and replaced about 90 percent of all our plantings and installed an irrigation system and two new walkways," Irene Cimino said.

Davis subcontracted the irrigation system's installation because it isn't his company's primary focus.

Cimino said she was most impressed by Davis' professionalism and responsiveness. "Billy and I kept in constant contact throughout the job. When I called him, he would answer the phone, 'Hello, Mrs. Cimino!' He even returned our phone calls when he was on vacation."

Davis has a deep-rooted philosophy about future growth, saying he would like his company to grow slowly.

"When we go onto a property, I can promise the client that their trees and plants will get the attention and care they need," he said. "I know that it will be either myself or Andy on the job, and I know the quality and the care that the two of us provide.

"I would love to have another crew one day, but it will be hard to find someone that I can trust as much as Andy."

This story can be found at: http://www.timesdispatch.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RTD/MGArticle/RTD_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1149190658929

[Go Back](#)