

Tree climbing for grown ups

Linus Wood is an arborist with 20 years' experience and he has been running his company, Tree Contracts, for 11 years. 'As a profession, it's different. You've got to have a head for heights, you have to be willing to work hard, because it's very physically demanding, and it's a three-dimensional job. On a daily basis, you are working out a 3-D jigsaw puzzle.'

That awareness of where everything is around you, where it is going, and respecting that you are working with a living thing are all vital to doing the job well, Linus explains. 'When you are up a big tree and you are taking out branches that are above you, and you are having to get them to the ground without breaking something, including yourself, it's great! You have to let that adrenalin of working in a dangerous environment focus you.'

Finding people with that combination of skills and motivation can be tricky but Linus has worked hard to build his team. 'I honestly believe that we are one of the best tree companies in the country. You would be hard pressed to find a company of our size where all of the staff are qualified arborists. We are really good at what we do.'

Linus takes his role as an employer in a small community seriously. He has built the company slowly and steadily so that he can ensure continuity of work for himself and the team. 'I don't want to employ someone one week and then tell them three weeks later that we have run out of work. I support people and they support me.'

Something that appeals to Linus is that he can physically see what he has achieved at the end of each day. 'We may have changed the shape and health of a tree, changed someone's property and made their view better, or just made them feel a lot safer; the sense of satisfaction is enormous.'

Getting a chance to actually climb a tree has become harder for Linus as the business has grown. 'I get about four hours a month on the tools, if I'm lucky. The rest of the time, I'm running around keeping it all running. The cost to run even a little business like this is huge and it takes a lot of time.'

Planning is a big part of each job for Linus. 'When I first go to look at a job, I have to figure out how I am going to do it, what equipment I will need and what the price it will need to be. Then there are Council consents to do and, typically, it takes a month between looking at a job and being able to start on it.'

Working on keeping historic trees healthy is something Linus feels privileged to be able to do. 'We do a survey of all the trees in the Mansion House grounds (Kawau) every five years and make recommendations on what work needs doing. Some of those trees are the first of those species ever planted in New Zealand so working on keeping them healthy is fantastic.'

There are two basic ways to become an arborist in New Zealand – an apprenticeship or academic courses run by Wintec in Hamilton or Otago Polytechnic. Linus explains, 'I think the apprenticeship is the better way to go because, at the end, you have three years of practical experience.'

When all is said and done, it's still all about getting up a tree for Linus. 'Sometimes, you're at a property and they don't have a view, but you climb their tree and there is a magnificent view! On those days, it's just glorious.'

facebook.com/treecontracts or treecontracts.co.nz