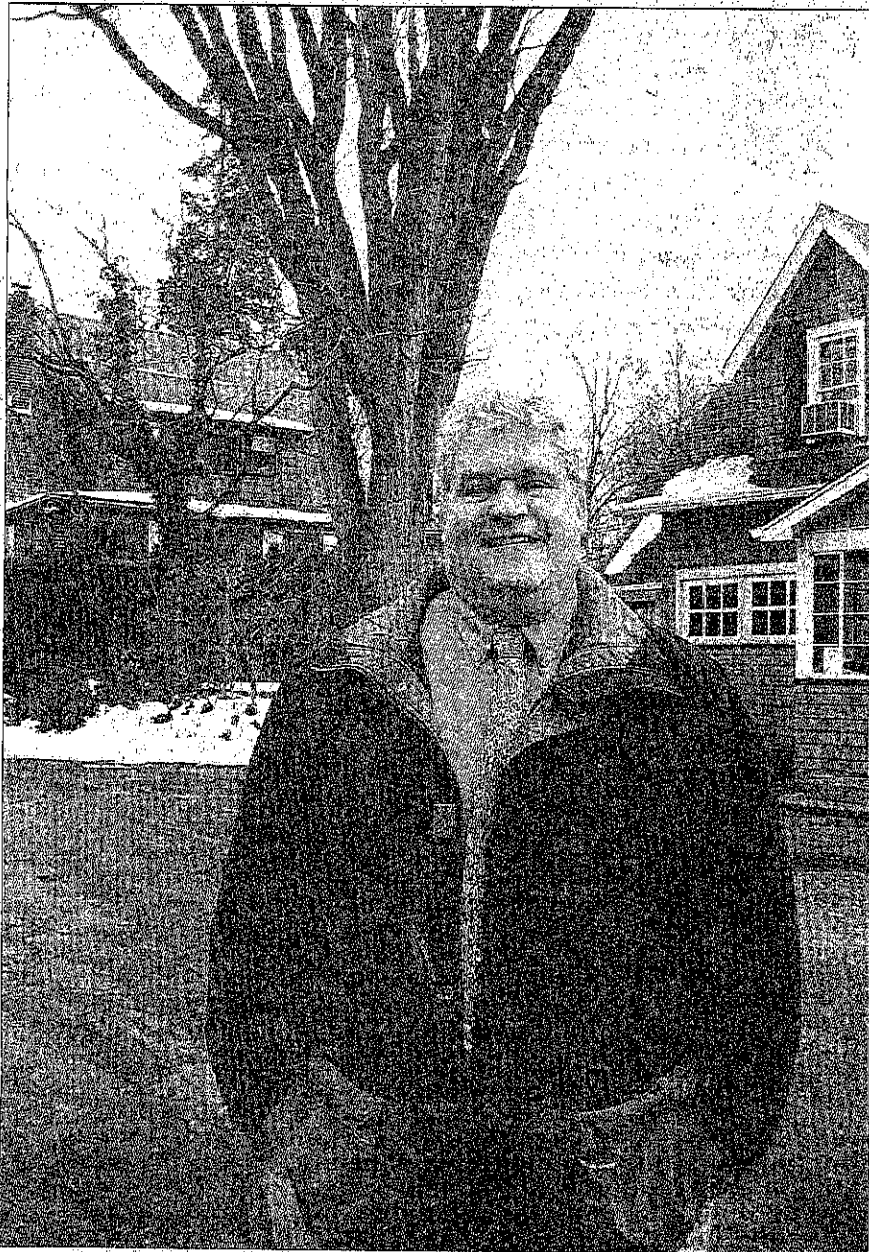


# SUN MESSENGER

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## A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION



JEFF PIORKOWSKI/SUN NEWS

Lauren Lanphear standing on the property he knows so well — the 100-year-old Forest City Tree Protection Co. Lanphear grew up on the property and now lives in the house to the left. To the right is the office building for the South Green Road business.

## SE's Forest City Tree Protection reflects on its 100-year-old roots

By Jeff Piorkowski  
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It may sound like a bad pun, but the Forest City Tree Protection Company's roots really do run deep.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the company, 1884 South Green Road in South Euclid, whose origins go back to the time when Cleveland was known as The Forest City.

Those origins actually go back a little further, still.

It was in the summer of 1902 that William P. "Will" Lanphear, a student at Western Reserve University, found work trimming and caring for trees along Euclid Avenue in Cleve-

land, and in the eastern suburbs, including Gates Mills.

He had entered the business after having met the acquaintance of John Davey at the old Sheriff Street Market, at about the present-day site of Quicken Loans Arena.

The Davey and Lanphear families had a history. When the Daveys settled in the 1870s in Warren, Ohio, they stayed in the home of their minister. That minister was John Wesley Lanphear.

John Davey founded in 1880 the Davey Tree Expert Company, today the largest residential tree care company in North America. Now known as the father of the science of tree

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# ROOTS

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surgery, Davey asked the minister's son, Will Lanphear, if he wanted to do some summer work while college was in recess.

"John Davey then asked him if he wanted to do work in Tarrytown, N.Y., but my grandfather would have had to move there," said Lanphear's grandson and the business's current proprietor, Lauren Lanphear. "He wanted to stay in Cleveland, and he ended up starting this business."

## Well-versed in company's history

Today, Forest City Tree Protection Co. employees can be found throughout the area doing a variety of work. That work includes pruning for tree health and safety, installation of cabling and bracing hardware to keep split trees sturdy, working to preserve trees that may be in the way of construction of buildings or parking lots, or battling against tree diseases.

There is other work as well, but as Lauren Lanphear said, "We focus on preserving trees rather than looking for trees to remove."

After its Cleveland start, Forest City Tree Protection became the forester for the city of Cleveland Heights in 1914, a job it held until 1968 when the city formed its own department to do the work. The business moved to South Euclid in 1918, where Will Lanphear had a large home built.

He lived in the home until his death in 1966, and the house now serves as home to Lauren Lanphear and his wife, Susan. Together, they raised two children there.

Lauren Lanphear is extremely well-versed in his family's, and therefore the business's history, recalling various dates and figures at will.

"The original piece of land was just 60 feet wide, and 1,000 feet deep," he said of the business's property. "It went back to what is now Templehurst (Road). It's now 4½ acres. (His grandfather) bought most of the rest of the land we have now in the 1930s. It was the Great Depression and he bought it through tax sales."

"They were supposed to put in a development here called Belvoir Gardens, and it was supposed to be all English Tudors, but that didn't happen because of the Depression."

During the Depression, the founding Lanphear created business in any way he could. In addition to arborist work, Christmas trees and firewood were sold at Forest City.

## Lanphear family intertwined with business

The property upon which the business is located has been synonymous with the Lanphear family for the past century.

Lauren and his two siblings, were raised in a home to the rear of the property. His father, Will, III became president upon the founding Lanphear's death, while Lauren's uncle, John, was board chairman until his retirement due to health reasons in 1975.

Lauren's mother, Joan Liebenhauer Lanphear, also a Western Reserve graduate, also worked at the business. Will, III and Joan Lanphear both died in 2000, six weeks apart.

"At one point, my father, mother, mother-in-law, uncle and my wife all worked here," Lauren Lanphear said. "I used to say that I had to go home to get away from my family."

Although he had two siblings, Lauren was the one who had the interest and desire to keep the family business going.

"I took a year off after I graduated from Brush (High School in 1974) and before going to college," he said. "During that year, I got to



JEFF PIORKOWSKI/SUN NEWS

Forest City Tree Protection Co. has become a landmark in South Euclid, having moved to the city in 1918.

work more with my father and go with him to conferences and learn more about the business. That's when I decided I wanted to do this."

Lanphear went on to earn a degree from Hiram College with a double major in botany and religion. He told people at the time of his majors, "I work with that which only God can make."

## Several innovations

There have been several innovations in the business over the years. In the first part of the 20th century, man-powered saws were used to cut limbs, and horses utilized to drag logs.

"When my grandfather

started the business, there was no such thing as brush chippers or a chain saw. My father saw his first chain saws during World War II because the Germans invented them. When he got home, he told my grandfather that he had to look into them."

Today, Forest City has on its property a retail shop that sells mainly to professionals in the forestry business. The Lanphear Supply Division was formed in the 1950s and today continues to sell Stihl power equipment, made by the German-based company.

In addition, in 1979, the company formed an offshoot called Chim, Chim Cher-ee

Professional Chimney Sweeps, providing chimney cleaning services to homeowners.

## Hiring people not an easy task

As one might expect, hiring people to work for a company such as Forest City Tree Protection isn't always easy. After all, the work entails climbing to great heights, thus there is a need for balance, strength to operate machinery when one climbs those heights, and the knowledge of what must be done to a tree while suspended high above street level.

The company is made up of 12-15 skilled professionals, depending on the time of year.

"Four of us are certified arborists by the International Society of Arboriculture," Lanphear said.

At the same time, Lanphear has a substantial list of professional awards and membership associations to his credit.

The father of two grown children, Lanphear became the company's president in 1993, 10 years after his father's retirement. He had become vice president and a shareholder in 1980.

## The final chapter?

His children have gone on to work in other businesses, meaning it is not known what will happen with the company when Lauren Lanphear decides to enter into retirement.

"Who knows?" he said. "I'm at peace with it. I put another quarter century into (continuing the business). It would be great if somebody else wanted to do it, but not just to do it. I would rather have somebody who really wants to do it."

With business going well, Lanphear is happy to have the link with his past, both personal and professional, alive in his mind.

"My grandfather died when I was kind of young, but I still remember him," Lanphear said. "I remember when he used to burn brush in the

back. He'd gather it all up and take it back there and put gasoline on it and start a fire.

"I remember the time when he came back with a blackened face from the fire and said, 'I think I put too much gasoline on this time.' Of course, we didn't know about hurting the environment then and we do things today in an environmentally friendly way."

After 100 years, the process is different, but the work remains.