

# CAREER PROFILES

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## Climb for success

*Edmontonian switches careers and finds her true calling*

By PATTY JESSOME  
Staff Writer

Verna Mumby knew exactly what she was doing when she gave up a great job in agriculture.

"After five years (in the dairy industry as an agrologist), I finally asked myself, 'What am I doing in agriculture when I just love horticulture,'" she says from her Comox, B.C. home, where she recently relocated from Edmonton.

With that in mind, she hung up her dairy duds to return to school and earned her arborist certificate.

After five years in the field toiling for others she decided to take a chance and opened her own business. Mumby's Tree Service was born and over the next 10 years she built a successful business, using her unique philosophy to earn a reputation that clients would warm up to. "I have a different philosophy than other arborists. I will spend time talking you out of cutting down a tree if it's healthy and viable," she says.

She still enjoys climbing and pruning and now manages to do so in a milder climate than Edmonton. She also enjoys teaching her craft that takes her to Olds College here in Alberta as well as Regina. She admits though that today consulting takes up much of her time as her expertise allows her to consult clear across the country.

She recently took some time to answer a few questions about working as an arborist.

**What kind of education did you need to be an arborist?**

You have to obtain some form of education about arboriculture or horticulture at the college or university level. You must also have three years of field experience working in the arboriculture industry before you can write the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Arborist Certification exam. (<http://www.isa-arbor.com>.)

**Do you need to be physically fit?**

For most of the jobs available in the arboriculture industry the answer is yes.

**Is it a requirement to enjoy the outdoors?**

If you love trees and working with trees, you will love working outdoors.

**What is the best part of the job?**

After I have either pruned or cared for a tree, I see the beauty of the plant in its setting. And when people recognize good pruning and responsible tree care and appreciate it.

**What is the least favourite part of your job?**

Pruning trees in cold weather.

**When did you start consulting?**

In 1997 in Manitoba, I did my first tree damage case due to aerial spray damage.

**Do you see yourself doing this job (climbing trees) in five years or will consulting be the mainstay of your business?**

Consulting and teaching is 65% of my business, the other 35% is in tree care. I will continue to prune and climb trees. I love to climb and connect with the trees. My ability to climb helps my consulting work as I can climb the tree that needs assessing versus renting a bucket truck. It is important to be able to prune or care for trees to maintain a connection with trees and understand how they function and react to our care.

**Do you prefer to be your own boss?**

Yes I do. In our industry we work with living things. Each of us has our own ethics



— PATTY JESSOME, Sun photo

Verna Mumby of Mumby's Tree Service is in her element as she climbs a mountain ash with some serious pruning problems last fall. She also finds time to consult and teach at various educational facilities across the prairies.

about caring for living things. Unfortunately there are people out there that will remove perfectly healthy trees for no valid reason or top trees, which endangers the health of the tree.

Being my own boss, I answer to my 'tree morals' no one else's.

**What are some of the pitfalls of owning your own business?**

Like in all small business, it seems like there never is enough time to complete all the tasks of an employer: as the bookkeeper, as the arborist . . .

**What three qualities would one need to be successful in this industry?**

If you are self-employed then you must have the ability to work long days. If you are an employee, be able to work six - seven

hours per day outdoors in a physical manner. You have to understand the trees, know your biology and botany of trees, and keep up with the technology of the industry and last do good quality work; always remember you are working with living things. If you care for the trees properly, they will continue to provide us with their beauty and all those other positive elements they do in the environment.

**Is it prosperous?**

Like many small businesses, it takes a few years to build up your client list. On average after five years most arboricultural companies are prosperous.

**Where can people learn more about arboriculture if they are interested in pursuing this career?**

In Alberta, Olds College (<http://www.oldscollege.ab.ca>) has an excellent Arboriculture program.

But there are a number of colleges and universities one can study at. Check these out as well.

— Humber College Ontario (<http://postsecondary.humber.ca/01991.htm>)

— Lambton College Ontario (<http://www.lambton.on.ca/Programs>)

— University of Guelph, Ontario ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/diploma\\_calendar/](http://www.uoguelph.ca/diploma_calendar/))

— Tree Care Industry Association web page of colleges in the US and UK ([http://128.241.193.252/Public/product\\_careers\\_educational\\_links.htm](http://128.241.193.252/Public/product_careers_educational_links.htm)).

— Reach Verna Mumby at [www.treelady.ca](http://www.treelady.ca) or call her toll free at 1-877-339-6951.