

Going out on a limb, for clients, workers



EXECUTIVE SUITE

Lisa Du

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The passion that Mike Gaines has for trees is clear when he talks about his work.

Gaines, 38, president and owner of CW Arborists in Sagaponack, grew up in East Hampton and remembers being fond of nature as a child. When he grew up he opened several businesses that did landscaping and gardening. But as time passed he felt that people he hired to do tree work for his company were mishandling the greenery, and so he went in search of knowledge about trees.

He became a board-certified master arborist through the International Society of Arboriculture's education program. Now he has made it a mission of CW Arborists to handle trees in a sustainable fashion and to educate others about correct methods of tree care.

How did you get started with CW Arborists?

"I don't know if there's any one road that led me here. I think it's a culmination of life experiences. One thing that is very handy is that in my youth I worked in a garden center in Montauk, and I learned a lot about plants and plant life there. I also worked on fishing boats, and that gave me a lot of natural instinct. It allowed me to use ropes very well, to understand movement and nature."

What would you describe the goal of your business to be?

"I would like to change the idea of tree care . . . by setting up a program inside our company where each person is required to go through training before they do any work. This is a goal to get them certified through the ISA. By having a staff of certified arborists, I hope we can help change the way tree care is handled inside our community."

How would you describe your leadership style?

"I have a lot of patience, because to understand this business takes a very long time. So I'm very tolerant, and I take a lot of time. People need experience to do this properly, and that's what is lacking in the industry. [There's] a lack of experience, hiring people without an education pro-



PHOTO BY GORDON M. GRANT

Mike Gaines, certified master arborist, says he's always been fond of nature.

CORPORATE snapshot

NAME: Mike Gaines
COMPANY: CW Arborists
TITLE: President
BUSINESS: Arboriculture (tree care)
LOCATION: Sagaponack
EMPLOYEES: Five full-time, three part-time
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$350,000

gram, and not being able to provide for your employees. I also want to say nurturing. My employees are very important to me, and safety does come first — it's not just a buzz phrase."

How did you learn to run a business?

"I made sure I had the right people there, and that really helped in running the business. I'm certainly more outdoorsy than I am an office person. And I have a great accountant and office manager."

Do you look for certain qualities when hiring?

"Interest and determination mostly."

What advice do you have for people who might be interested in the business?

"Don't be afraid to ask questions. One of the biggest things for me was understanding that I didn't know. And to always look for that information and knowledge. There's another group where people can start, the Long Island Arboricultural Association, and I'm a board member. [It] can help anyone that wants to know which direction to go."

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