

Safety, reliability key to tree care in Sisters Country

By Jim Cornelius *EDITOR IN CHIEF*

A lot has changed in Sisters and the world in recent weeks — but the need to care for our trees remains.

Doing that job right requires a wide range of knowledge and experience; the right equipment for the job; and a commitment to safety and reliability.

James Hatley and 4 Brothers Tree Service has quickly built a reputation in Sisters Country for responsiveness, reliability and high-quality work. That reputation allowed Hatley to run two crews last summer to keep up with demand for his services.

Tree work is something of a calling for Hatley. He's been in the trade since he was 18 in Yakima, Washington, and he launched 4 Brothers Tree Service in Central Oregon in May, 2017. Since then, the business has been thriving.

The company is named in honor of his four young sons and the logo is a silhouette of the boys. Family is a key aspect of the way Hatley operates.

"I've always been in family business," he said. "My dad and my grandpa had a wrecking yard in Washington for 33 years and all the companies I've worked for have been family owned and run."

The family aspect puts "a little bit more integrity into the work, I

believe. A little more caring in the work. It puts it a little more on the personal level than the business level to me."

4 Brothers Tree Service provides a full range of services — tree removal, pruning, stump-grinding, fire-fuel reduction, lot-clearing and commercial thinning. In winter, they provide snow-removal services.

He's well-equipped to handle any tree service job, from a planned project to an emergency such as a tree limb falling on your house or vehicle. That helps ensure that work is done in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible.

"The equipment I've acquired has made the job faster and therefore less expensive for the customer," Hatley said.

Over the past year, he's added a larger, more efficient stump grinder and a new four-wheel-drive bucket truck.

Their grinders are able to fit through 36-inch wide gates to access hard-to-reach backyard stumps.

"For a surface grind we will grind the stump below grade so you may grow grass where the stump was or if you choose to replant another tree or shrub, we'll grind the stump completely out," Hatley said.

When finished, the wood chips

are raked into a mound over the hole and the lawn is left looking better than before. Hatley notes that many homeowners enjoy using the remaining wood chips as mulch for flowerbeds.

"As an option, we can remove the wood chips, fill the hole with topsoil, apply seed/straw or sod, or leave a hole so you can plant your next valuable tree," he said.

4 Brothers also provides lot clearing services — not just trees and shrubs, but also removal of stumps, logs, rocks, dirt, gravel, demolition, grass, weeds, etc.

"Don't be afraid to ask," Hatley said. "We'll come take a look and help any way we can."

A couple of days' lead-time is usually all that is necessary to obtain an estimate for work.

The 4 Brothers Tree Service crew is working through the current coronavirus crisis. Discussions about the work are done by phone or at a distance, and crews maintain social distance and are just working and going home to their families.

"There are still things that need to be done as far as fire fuel reduction," Hatley noted. "Necessary things as opposed to aesthetics."

Customers usually know what they want him to do, but Hatley will assess conditions and risk. Sometimes he is able to allay a homeowner's concern about a tree and let them know it's fine.

When it's evident that trees have to come down, Hatley will provide a variety of options as to disposition of the wood — leave it down, haul it out, cut firewood — that give customers a range of prices to choose from.

Many homeowners strongly desire to save a tree, and Hatley will do everything he can to make that happen. He notes that, "we don't like topping trees, because it's not right — it's not good for the tree." Under certain circumstances they'll do so because "sometimes it's the safest way while still keeping the tree."

Hatley is glad that Sisters escaped the heavy snowfall that damaged so many trees a couple of winters ago.

"I'd rather not go out taking down broken trees — because the customer didn't want that tree removed," he said.

He's also pleased to see that

concerns about high mortality events have not come to pass so far.

"There was supposed to be a wave of beetle kill coming through," he said. "I haven't really seen a lot of it."

While it might seem that they're in the straightforward business of cutting down trees, 4 Brothers Tree Service is really about the health of the landscape. They'll save trees wherever they can.

Often 4 Brothers Tree Service can save a vulnerable co-dominant tree (one that forks into more than one trunk) by tying it off so that the trunks grow closer together and are less likely to split away. Or, if one trunk is less dominant, sometimes that one can be limbed off.

"No two trees are alike," Hatley said. "It's all job-specific — tree-specific, you could say."

A dead or dying tree can pose a

big hazard to life and property, and property owners should regularly assess the condition of their trees.

"Look up!" Hatley urges.

Sometimes branches are broken and go unnoticed until wind or snow brings

them down. Junipers — as many folks in Sisters discovered last month — are brittle and subject to breaking under load.

Look for discolored needles — that's a sign of ill health. A tree that has been girdled by having the bark chewed off by animals is in bad shape, too. It's best to be proactive rather than risking a catastrophic event.

Hatley enjoys climbing.

"I don't mind being 100 feet in the air," he said with a smile.

But he also acknowledges that his is one of the most dangerous jobs around, and safety for all concerned is always the top priority.

Another important priority is making sure you have whatever permits and paperwork are required before starting to remove trees. Check with your homeowners association or with the City of Sisters about requirements and make sure all is in order before starting work, as fines for illegal tree removal can be steep.

And if you have any questions, James Hatley and 4 Brothers Tree Service are ready to come to your property to make an assessment.

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— James Hatley

