

Troops partner with tree company for training

By DAVID AMBRO

In the event that another natural disaster strikes Long Island, there is an army of troops on the ready.

About 30 members of the New York National Guard participated in arborist chain saw safety certification training at Reliable Tree Service in Smithtown Sunday, November 16. First in the classroom and then in chaps in the wood pile the men learned safe and efficient use of a chain saw at a level to become certified by the International Society of Arboriculture.

The training was led by Reliable Tree Service owner Frank Prisco, who donated his time and his facility on Jericho Turnpike in Smithtown for the training course. "I take my hat off to these guys for donating their time for our benefit and without asking for anything in return. When I was approached about this, I wanted to be part of it," Mr. Prisco said during a break in Sunday's session.

Mr. Prisco said the training that the guardsmen received Sunday is the same training that he provides to Reliable Tree Service employees, before they can even get on a crew. Reliable is under contract with the Town of Smithtown to provide tree clearing services, which includes mobilization to support the National Guard in the event of a natural disaster.

"In a hurricane situation, they will take professional companies like mine and integrate them with these guys,"



MAKE THE CUT: Frank Prisco (right) instructs a New York National guardsman in the proper operation of a chain saw during a training session Sunday.

Mr. Prisco said. "Yeah, if there was a hurricane situation I would take these guys with me after today."

First Lieutenant Vincent Trimarco, Jr., the unit's spokesman and JAG officer, said one of the New York

National Guard's primary functions has been to support the Army National Guard, a branch of the United States military, during times of natural disasters. He said that clearing trees from roads and power lines is a

major part of that work, which made Sunday's eight-hour training session especially important.

The troops of the New York National Guard who trained at reliable Tree Service Sunday are members of the 14th Brigade on Long Island, which operates from armory buildings in Huntington Station, Riverhead, Freeport and Uniondale. At Sunday's training session was 14th Brigade Commander Mark Sarro, who commended Mr. Prisco for his volunteerism to help with the chain saw training.

"It is a great training opportunity for us to work with him," Commander Sarro said. He said that since Hurricane Katrina the Homeland Security model has been to have troops supplemented by private sector experts and equipment, and that by working with Reliable Tree Services the Guard is solidifying that relationship. Commander Sarro said in addition to the 14th Brigade the 88th New York National Guard Brigade in New York City sent men to Sunday's training session at Reliable Tree Service.

According to Commander Sarro the New York National Guard is deployed often, most recently during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, during Hurricane Floyd, for the Y2K threat and for several other bad storms that have pounded the area. He said the members of the guard train for one weekend a month to remain prepared.

"We are support troops not gun wielding soldiers," he said.