

In Recognition of Tree Climbers

I was recently appointed chair of the International Tree Climbing Championship's Strategic Planning Subcommittee, and my involvement has given me insight into what without a doubt is the largest sector of worldwide arboricultural practice—tree climbing.

Because of what I now know about the incredibly athletic innovators and technicians who compete at such a high standard, I am motivated to speak out in their support. Their aerial balletlike movements, executed with grace, strength, assuredness, and a concern for safety, are highlighted in two all-too-brief days at ISA's annual conference, where they compete in the ITCC to become world champion.

Like the educators I recognized in my Officer Speaks Out column last year, they are, within their areas of specialty, the educators of technique, innovators of safe practice, and designers and developers of state-of-the-art tree work and climbing equipment. The benefits of their knowledge, experience, and expertise filter down to those carrying out aerial tree work each and every day worldwide.

If you doubt this fact, check out the number of climbers who post at the Tree Buzz Web site (www.treebuzz.com) and the number of them who compete at chapter, regional, national, and international tree climbing championships. Furthermore, check out the freely given advice to those seeking to improve and climb safely.

To suggest, as I have heard, that the climbers at ITCC are just providing entertainment at our conference is an insult based on a lack of understanding, lack of information, minimal knowledge of the subject, and absolutely no realization that these competitors are the showcase for a large workforce who are not adequately represented or recognized by ISA.

Although I acknowledge, for example, the work of our limited number of researchers (often financed by the TREE Fund), where is the investment in the tree worker and the tree climber? Where is the regular publication that meets the needs of those who day after day work intimately with trees and constantly seek knowledge and information? Where, indeed, is the funding to support the research and development of new personal protective equipment, safety practices, and new climbing and tree work techniques?

The competitive climbers evolve, design, and test new equipment and techniques. Check out the now-vast array of equipment such as saddles, harnesses, throwlines, lanyards, ropes, and carabiners in equipment catalogs, and see where the ideas, research, and development behind such items as the Port-a-Wrap and the new treeMotion harness come from.

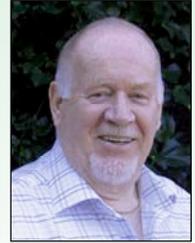
It is because of these climbing competitions—where there is no bar to race, color, sex, or creed—that tree work can increasingly be carried out to such a high, efficient, and safe standard.

We at ISA need to provide greater support, recognition, and financial investment in this great workforce. We need to bring training, encouragement, new techniques, and better and safer working practices to tree climbers in their local areas. In that way, we will reach a potentially large number of new members. Maybe there should be a tree worker category of membership. I want to see greater awareness for those who can showcase increased standards of work and safety, and, at the same time, I want to get rid of the notion that climbers are solely a source of entertainment.

This is a call to those involved in all aspects of our profession. We need to increase the presence and numbers of tree competition climbers. With increased recognition and publicity for the International Tree Climbing Championship, we can increase awareness for trees, their care, and their maintenance. We need to make the ITCC financially viable and secure as our showcase event and sustainable in its administration in order to spread the word and increase membership.

Please attend tree climbing championships around the world and see how you might assist. You do not necessarily have to have been a climber to be a judge, scorer, or technician; however, climbing experience might prove useful in mentoring potential new climbers or staffing information booths at such events.

Enjoy, support, and participate in the camaraderie, laughter, excellence, and sheer joy of climbing competitions, and, most of all, put your hands together with me and applaud the true “masters of swing” and the great work they do. 



By Colin Bashford
ISA Vice President

