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Number 6

UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

LEADERS IN OUR INDUSTRY

2025 UAA AWARD
RECIPIENTS

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We are an organization of over 5,000 individuals with interest in, and a commitment to, the maintenance of trees and other vegetation for the purpose of ensuring the safe and reliable distribution of energy, including electric, oil, and gas, to business and residences.

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Turn to **page 12** to read about the UAA Award winners for 2025!

Learn about one man's journey from a hopeless prisoner to a saved life as an ISA Certified Arborist on **page 22**.



Read about partnering with local communities to educate the public on the importance of forestry stewardship **page 40**.

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This is a list of common industry terms and acronyms frequently used in this magazine.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Best Management Practices (BMPs)
Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS)
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)
Geographic Information System (GIS)
Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)

Machine Learning (ML)
National Safety Council (NSC)
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Rights-of-Way (ROW)
Small Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (sUAVs)

Subject Matter Expert (SME)
Transmission and Distribution (T&D)
Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)
Vegetation Management (VM)
Visual Line of Sight (VLOS)
Virtual Reality (VR)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Josh Beaver

Reflections from 30,000 Feet

As I took in the scenery from my window seat at 30,000 feet one beautiful evening, my thoughts shifted focus to our incredible industry, the leaders who shaped it, and the promising future ahead. Serving on the Utility Arborist Association Board of Directors has given me a front-row seat to the remarkable talent driving our profession forward.

I've often found myself in conversations wondering who would rise to lead once the industry's heavyweights stepped aside. Today, I'm confident in our trajectory. The depth of talent emerging across the country assures me that our future is in capable hands.

But talent alone isn't enough. We must continue to cultivate it—through certification and degree programs, through mentorship, and through a shared commitment to professional development. Only then can we harness the best practices and technologies that will define the next era of utility arboriculture.

As incoming President of the UAA, I'm proud to witness a transformative moment in our industry—one where workforce development is a collective effort. Across the country, new and expanded training programs are equipping utility arborists with the skills, certifications, and confidence to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving landscape.

From Butte College's Train as an Arborist program to Alpena Community College's accredited one-year Utility Arborist Program in Michigan, and intensive courses at Folsom Lake College and College of the Sequoias in California, we're seeing a surge in high-quality education.

For those seeking advanced credentials, the ISA Utility Specialist Certification and the UVM Professional Development Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point offer rigorous, career-enhancing opportunities for leadership and specialization.

These programs are more than training—they're investments in safety and the future of our workforce. They reflect our collective commitment to excellence and innovation.

During our strategic planning session this spring in Kalispell, Montana, we reaffirmed workforce development as a cornerstone of our mission. The conversations among leaders, educators, and field professionals underscored the

urgency of building strong pipelines into our profession and supporting arborists at every stage of their careers.

KEY PILLARS OF RETENTION

Recruiting new talent is only half the challenge. Retaining skilled arborists requires a clear commitment to their growth and long-term success. That's why we must prioritize the following pillars:

- **Structured Career Ladders**—Whether field staff, crew leaders, supervisors, or beyond, employees need to see a future in this field. Defined roles, transparent promotion criteria, and leadership development programs help build that vision and foster long-term engagement.
- **Ongoing Education**—Continuing education, certifications, and mentorship opportunities keep employees engaged and growing. The programs provide clear pathways for advancement and specialization.
- **Supportive Work Environments**—Investing in professional development fosters loyalty and pride. When employees feel valued, they stay, and they become future leaders.
- **Recognition and Purpose**—Utility arborists protect lives, infrastructure, and our communities. Celebrating that impact and recognizing excellence strengthens our culture and workforce.

By building a profession, we ensure utility arboriculture remains a career of choice for generations to come.

UAA'S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

At the core of UAA's educational mission are our dedicated volunteer committees. These groups shape content, guide credential development, and create opportunities for professional growth. They bring together subject matter experts, field leaders, and passionate volunteers to provide their feedback and perspective. Whether you're a seasoned professional or just starting out, valuable content is being created to support your development.

Let's continue to mentor, recruit, and support the next generation of utility arborists. Let's ensure that every professional, whether just beginning or decades into their career, has access to the resources they need to thrive.

Together, we're not just managing vegetation, we're cultivating a resilient, skilled, and proud workforce.

I look forward to the upcoming year in my new role, and I wish you all a happy fall season! 🍂

Josh Beaver

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon



While working on my undergraduate degree, I was told I needed to take some sociology courses before earning the degree. I signed up for an environmental sociology course, thinking it might have some hint of an area I wanted to study—trees and the environment—versus an area that had not intrigued me much, like studying humans and their behaviors. This human behavior course taught Maslow's hierarchy of needs, originally published in 1943. Maslow described needs in five layers, where the lower layers must be satisfied before moving to the higher layers. Later, economists would use a pyramid sketch to help describe the theory. The lowest levels are the most basic physiological needs, like shelter, food, and water. The next level is safety and health, followed by belonging, status, and lastly, self-actualization, or the desire to better ourselves.

This edition of the UAN focuses on workforce development and education. Supporting individuals in reaching their career goals is the secret sauce to successful workforce retention. When employees primarily seek to satisfy the lower-level needs of Maslow's hierarchy, retention tends to be straightforward—the job fulfills their basic needs. As these needs are more effectively met, retaining employees becomes more nuanced. It transitions from employees *needing* a job to *wanting* to be a part of the organization.

This shift from need to want is where education and workforce development play crucial roles for organizations aiming to maintain a stable, competent, and dependable workforce. It highlights the importance of meeting employees where they are in their development journey.

Phil Swart, the chair of the UAA Professional Development Committee, initiated a poll on LinkedIn to determine the most valuable form of education for the next generation of UVM workers: degrees/certifications, mentorship, on-the-job training (OJT), or technology and artificial intelligence tools. The truth is that the significance of each varies throughout our careers. Each option is vital and their importance may fluctuate based on individual circumstances.

It seems a bit odd to me that it took until 1943 for someone to qualify a hierarchy of basic human needs. Then again, in retrospect, we still do not fully understand why tree roots go where they go, and trees have also been around for millennia. Maslow's approach to needs can serve as a model for education, which can drive worker retention. Start with the basics. And when folks have satisfied those needs, continue to satisfy higher levels of need, because at some point, *need* becomes *want*. And if you have both a workforce that wants to learn and the ability to provide education that meets them where they are, they will want to stay with your organization.

If you have a desire to help create and elevate UVM educational offerings, consider joining the Professional Development Committee or another UAA committee. Check out the UAA website, www.gotouaa.org, for educational tools that can be used to help folks advance their careers or to inquire about joining a committee. Please let us know if you have ideas for additional educational resources the UAA can assist in developing. 🌲

Dennis Fallon



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Why donate? Your donations to the UAA Nelsen Money Scholarship Program support students looking to pursue various careers in utility line clearance, UVM, arboriculture, forestry/urban forestry, and related fields to help boost our growing industry. Not only are you providing a prosperous future for students with higher graduation rates, but you can also earn a tax deduction for your organization and points to your PinE score. Donate today at www.gotouaa.org/scholarship-program or by scanning the QR code!

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE UPDATE



Elizabeth Murray

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2026 Preview: Newsline Themes and Insights

By Elizabeth Murray, Marketing and Communications Manager, Lewis Services, and UAA Editorial Committee Chair

2025 was another exciting year for the UAA Editorial Committee as we welcomed new committee members, introduced fresh features and themes, and published fantastic articles from industry experts. We thank all contributors for sharing thought-provoking, educational content that continues to inspire and motivate us.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Editorial Committee is committed to advancing the mission of the *Utility Arborist Newsline* (UAN) by publishing issues rooted in excellence, innovation, professional development, outreach, research, and the promotion of best practices. In support of these objectives, we are pleased to announce the 2026 Editorial Calendar and Themes for each issue:

- **JAN/FEB: Strategic Climate Risk Readiness**—Pre-storm and post-disaster strategies to mitigate risk and plan response
- **MAR/APR: Environmental Stewardship**—Our collective efforts to protect and enhance our natural environment
- **MAY/JUN: The Safety Issue**—Dedicated to the vital topic of safety in all aspects of our work
- **JUL/AUG: People and Teamwork Powering Utilities**—A focus on “the people and partnerships that power UVM”

- **SEP/OCT: Next-Gen Vegetation Management Technology**—

Showcasing the technology that is shaping tomorrow's UVM

- **NOV/DEC: Future-Ready Systems and Infrastructure**—Addressing shifting infrastructure needs for long-term sustainability

We will continue to publish prominent columns, as well as feature an exciting new one, that provide relevant insight into our dynamic industry:

- **Women in VM**—Highlights a different woman each issue, her journey, insights, and advice
- **UVM and the Law**—Industry laws, regulations, ordinances, advocacy groups, and more
- **A Road Less Traveled: Unique Career Paths to UVM**—Nontraditional paths to UVM
- **New! Rooted in Service: From Tree Care to Community Care**—How UVM steps up to serve, protect, and connect through volunteerism, partnerships, stewardship, and response

We welcome new voices and fresh perspectives! If you have ideas or stories that align with our themes, we encourage you to reach out and share them with us at newsline@gotouaa.org. Thank you again to our dedicated members and content contributors for your unwavering support. Your efforts are integral to the success of the UAN and the growth of our industry. Here's to another year of excellence and innovation! 🌳



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The UAA has been awarded
a \$5,000 donation from
MidAmerican Energy
Foundation to advance the
scalability of the Utility Line
Clearance Arborist Training!



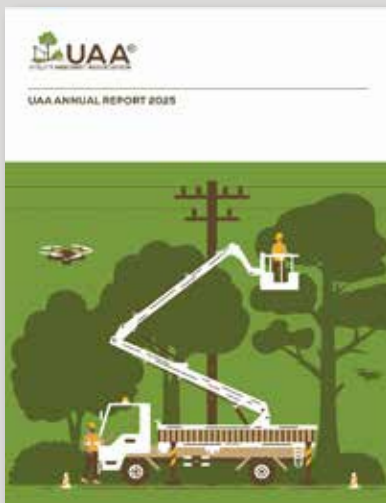
**Wisconsin Public Service
Foundation**

The UAA has been awarded
\$5,000 from Wisconsin Public
Service Foundation to update the
Professional Utility Vegetation
Management (UVM) curriculum!

photo/pexels.com/Michael Morse



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OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE



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Guiding the Next Generation: Highlights from the Trees & Utilities Conference Student Mentorship Program

By the UAA Outreach Committee

This year marked the launch of the first ever Trees & Utilities conference Student Mentorship Program, aimed at engaging the next generation of utility vegetation management professionals. The program welcomed 33 students from the University of Tennessee (UT) and Pellissippi State Community College, pairing them with 17 dedicated UAA member volunteers who served as mentors. The initiative kicked off with an August meeting where students and mentors connected, learned more about the utility arboriculture industry, and prepared for the upcoming conference experience.

Leading up to the conference, mentors met individually with students, virtually or in person, to discuss their interests, review career goals, and offer guidance on how to make the most of the event.

Students also met with UT Professor of Urban Forestry Sharon Jean-Philippe as well as UAA volunteers and gained insider perspectives on navigating the conference, tailoring resumes, and identifying career paths in the field. Mentor matches were thoughtfully made based on students' areas of

interest and the mentors' professional focus. The mentorship program not only introduced students to the professional world of utility vegetation management but it helped them envision their future in it.

To learn more about the student experience, we spoke with Anna Lisowski, a sophomore at the University of Tennessee, who participated in the program and attended the UAA annual conference. In this interview, she shares how the mentorship shaped her understanding of the industry, what it was like connecting with a professional mentor, and how the program influenced her career goals.

What was your overall impression of the conference experience?

Honestly, so far, it's really been eye-opening, especially for someone who's new to the forestry field. I knew going in that it's a who-you-know world, but it's also about putting yourself out there.

It has been very eye-opening because, well, I knew forestry has to innovate—it needs to innovate with technology. I didn't really understand how much technology would be

here, not just technology for heavy equipment but also working with drone technology, for example. I saw one person making 3D models of where wildfires occur, and then looking at the different species there and identifying the species. These applications were not something I had really thought about.

I think also, as a female in a male-dominated field, I have realized I need to put myself out there and I have to be confident and direct, not in a mean way but in a way of showing that I truly want to do this.

Before attending, were you familiar with the field of utility vegetation management?

I heard about it just briefly when an urban forestry professor, Sharon Jean-Philippe, was talking about urban forestry and she mentioned this conference and talked about utility vegetation management. But before then, not really. I also really didn't understand what it meant. This conference really helped me understand there's so many different ways of doing this work, and it's cool that each company does it a slightly different way than the next.

Did you meet with a mentor?

Yes. It's really been nice because he made it feel not less scary but a lot less stressful knowing that every single person at this conference has been where I am. For forestry especially, you have to put yourself out there. Nothing is going to come to you. It's been really nice.

What's one key takeaway or memorable insight you gained from the conference?

I know with technology and everything, my job might be affected. But how I've been approaching it is asking myself, "Whose job *won't* be affected?" Every single field has been impacted in some way—business, teaching, everything has been impacted. But it doesn't mean my field is going to be totally taken over. I mean, yes, a robot can go out into a field, but it can't talk and recount every single observation or identify every invasive species and know how to get rid of it.

One of the companies here was not only talking about invasive species but the diseases that increase with presence of invasive species and how to treat those diseases. That's something that AI's not going to think about, and I think it's really cool. Every single job in the world is going to change, but it is nice because I feel like there are still aspects of this industry that AI can't replace.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience in the mentorship program or at the conference?

Forestry is the happiest degree and happiest field to work in, and I think that's shown here. Everyone seems happy to be here and they love their jobs and are happy to talk about what they do. I was a pre-med major last year and now I have a whole different perspective about what this field looks like. I don't want to be in a lab my whole career—I want to work in the field and get any experience in the field that I can.

Thank you to the dedicated mentors who volunteered their time and expertise to the students of the mentorship program. Your guidance made a lasting impact on the next generation of utility vegetation professionals. 🌲

MENTORS

Benjamin Albert	Steve Scott
Lucas Beane	Matthew Searels
Christopher Harris	Amanda Smith
Paul Karpel	Phil Swart
Zach Krogmann	Brent Toler
Michelle Lejins	Robert Vanderhoof
Jamie McMillan	Shane Vosberg
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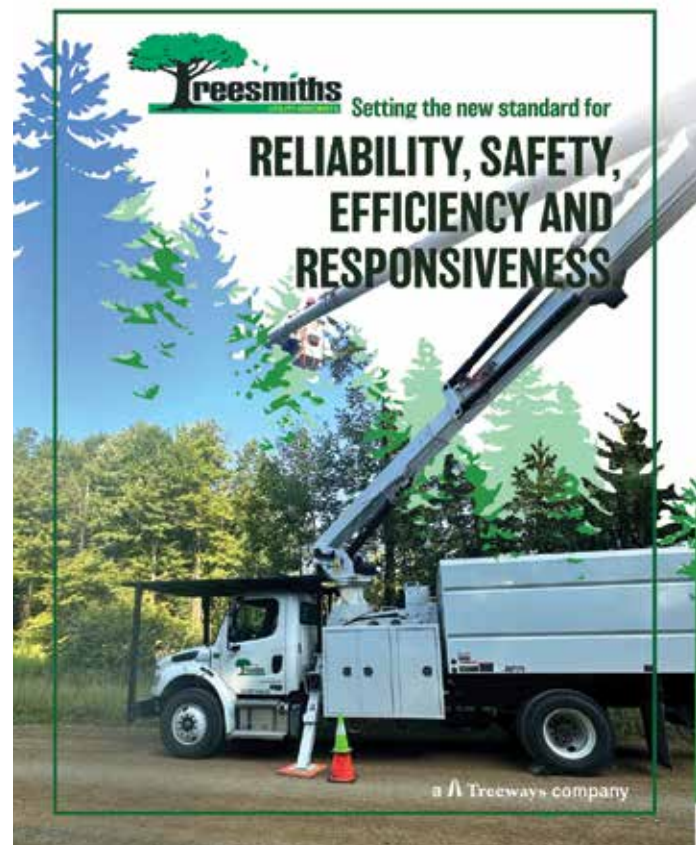
Our Divisions

Forestry & Utility

Environmental

Technology & Innovation

Sustainability



2025 UAA AWARDS

The annual UAA Awards recognize individuals who have earned the admiration of their peers by demonstrating their talent and skill in fulfilling the mission of the UAA over the past year. These recipients have stood out as leaders and champions of utility vegetation management and arboriculture best practices, guiding both the industry and the UAA toward continued success. Together, they represent the very best of our membership, and these honors signify official recognition of how their influence has advanced the UAA mission, vision, and values.



2025 Will Nutter Silver Shield Award Recipient
Holis Day (right)
with UAA Executive Director Dennis Fallon (left)



2025 Will Nutter Silver Shield Award Recipient
Wes Tregilgas (right)

WILL NUTTER SILVER SHIELD AWARD

The Will Nutter Silver Shield Award was established in 2016 and renamed in 2021 to honor the late Will Nutter, a passionate advocate for safe practices whose vision and commitment continue to inspire the Utility Arborist Association and the industry. This award recognizes individuals who demonstrate an extraordinary dedication to keeping safety at the forefront of every action and decision.

This year, two professionals are recognized for their unwavering dedication to ensuring that safety remains at the center of utility vegetation management: **Holis Day** and **Wes Tregilgas**.

Holis (Les) Day has distinguished himself through his leadership and expertise in addressing complex safety issues. Stepping into a critical role on the ANSI Z133 consensus standard, he provided clarity and structure to one of its most challenging sections, helping ensure that it reflects both practicality and protection. He has also served as a trusted resource through presentations, committee work, and collaboration across the industry, where his voice consistently raises the bar for safe practices. Day's ability to translate technical requirements into practical guidance has made him an indispensable leader, and his influence continues to help organizations create safer work environments.

Wes Tregilgas has demonstrated equal commitment, combining persistence with creativity in the way he approaches safety leadership. Always looking for ways to improve and inspire others to do the same, he has built trust among his peers and colleagues while pushing for solutions that strengthen operations and enhance the work experience. Beyond his daily responsibilities, he has contributed to UAA initiatives and industry events that emphasize both the technical and cultural dimensions of safety, extending his influence well beyond his own organization.

His leadership style not only reinforces standards but also encourages those around him to embrace safety as a shared responsibility.

Together, Les and Wes reflect the purpose of the Will Nutter Silver Shield Award, showing how a commitment to safety can influence culture, protect workers, and strengthen the entire profession.



2025 Rising Star Award Recipient
Michelle Lejins (right)

RISING STAR AWARD

The Rising Star Award is given to individuals who are relatively early in their careers yet have shown leadership within the UAA organization and the industry. These professionals demonstrate skill, initiative, and a clear commitment to advancing utility vegetation management and arboriculture. This year's Rising Star Award recipient is **Michelle Lejins**.

Michelle has taken on roles of growing responsibility in utility vegetation management, moving from fieldwork and consulting into leadership positions that balance client needs, safety, and program oversight. In her current role as regional supervisor, she guides operations while supporting both utility partners and the teams who carry out the work. Michelle's ability to connect technical expertise with day-to-day leadership has allowed her to build trust with colleagues and position her team for long-term success.

Her impact is seen not only through technical knowledge but also through the way she encourages collaboration and engagement. Michelle has been active within the UAA, serving on multiple committees and most recently chairing the Outreach Committee, where she has led initiatives that foster member connections and strengthen relationships with partner organizations. She has also brought visibility to the field through published writing and by mentoring others who are building their careers. These contributions show her commitment to creating a stronger, more connected industry community.

Michelle's energy, dedication, and growing influence embody the qualities celebrated by the Rising Star Award, marking her as a leader whose influence will continue to expand in the years ahead.



2025 Education Award Recipient
Larry Abernathy (middle) & Annie Rafferty (right)

EDUCATION AWARD

The Education Award recognizes an individual who has added to the knowledge and practices of the utility arborist. This honor highlights those who dedicate their time and expertise to preparing the next generation of professionals and advancing the standards that guide our work. This year's Education Award recipient is **Larry Abernathy**.

Larry's career spans decades of leadership and service in utility arboriculture, marked by a consistent focus on education and professional growth. Rising through the ranks at Davey Tree Expert Company, he coupled industry knowledge with a passion for developing training programs that raised expectations across the field. His efforts helped shape pathways for those entering utility vegetation management, making education a cornerstone of both safety and quality. His influence is reflected in the countless individuals whose careers were launched or strengthened through programs he helped create.

His involvement with the UAA further reinforced this commitment, from board service to spearheading the development of the UAA/Butte College Utility Arborist Training Program. This comprehensive course has provided countless entry-level professionals with the skills and confidence needed to succeed. Even in retirement, Larry continues to advise programs, mentor others, and support initiatives that ensure knowledge is shared widely and the industry's future remains strong. His dedication has made education not just an element of his career but its defining purpose.

Larry's contributions exemplify the purpose of the Education Award and the lasting impact of a career devoted to lifting others through learning.



2025 Utility Arborist Award Recipient
Lucas Beane (right)

UTILITY ARBORIST AWARD

The Utility Arborist Award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the field of utility arboriculture. This honor recognizes leaders whose influence strengthens both the industry and the UAA community. This year's Utility Arborist Award recipient is **Lucas Beane**.

Lucas has built a career defined by dedication, innovation, and service. With nearly two decades of experience, he has consistently demonstrated a commitment to advancing utility arboriculture by fostering safe practices, strengthening teams, and encouraging the adoption of new approaches that improve outcomes for both utilities and the public. His leadership style emphasizes collaboration and accountability, qualities that have earned him the respect of colleagues and peers across the profession.

His involvement with the UAA has been equally impactful. As chair of the Events Committee, Lucas has played a central role in planning and delivering training opportunities and regional gatherings that bring members together, expand knowledge, and promote professional growth. These efforts ensure that the UAA remains a place where members can learn, connect, and contribute to the progress of the industry. Through his work, he has helped make education and community-building a vital part of the association's mission.

Lucas's influence demonstrates the qualities celebrated by the Utility Arborist Award: significant contributions, steady leadership, and a career devoted to advancing the profession.



PRESIDENT'S AWARD

The President's Award is given by the outgoing president to recognize individuals they felt assisted them or the industry in extraordinary ways before, during, and after their term of office. This year, outgoing president Matt Goff has chosen to honor an individual whose contributions reflect not only professional achievement but also the willingness to step forward and help guide others. This year's President's Award recipient is **Cindy Devlin Musick**.

Cindy is recognized for her innovative yet practical approach to vegetation management and her steady willingness to contribute to the success of others. Throughout her career, she has combined deep technical knowledge with thoughtful leadership, ensuring that vegetation programs are built on both scientific rigor and a clear understanding of utility and community needs. In doing so, she has set a standard for professionalism that others strive to follow.

Her work with the UAA has been marked by generosity and collaboration. Cindy has consistently offered her time and perspective, providing thoughtful feedback, sharing expertise, and remaining open to new ideas. Her ability to listen, adapt, and lead by example has made her a trusted advisor to colleagues and a valued partner to UAA leadership.

Cindy's leadership, generosity, and steady guidance are celebrated this year through the President's Award, recognizing the lasting mark she has made on colleagues, the UAA, and the broader industry.



2025 President's Award Recipient
Cindy Devlin Musick (right)



2025 Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Rich Hendler (center) with Anna Davis (left), Samantha Hickey (behind), and Maegan Mullinax (right)

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual who has reached many milestones during their career as a utility arborist. This award honors those whose impact has been felt through leadership, mentorship, and a career devoted to strengthening the industry. This year's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient is **Rich Hendler**.

Rich's career reflects exactly what this award represents. A pioneer of integrated vegetation management practices long before it became standard, he helped utilities across the country build science-based programs that improve reliability while advancing environmental stewardship. During his decades at Dow Chemical Company, he specialized in IVM for utility rights-of-way and played a critical role in moving best practices from ideas into widely adopted standards.

Equally important, Rich has consistently shown the kind of leadership that strengthens not only programs but people. He has served as president of the Utility Arborist Association, the inaugural president of the Texas Vegetation Management Association, and held leadership roles in multiple regional associations. He also helped create the Southwest Utility Managers (SWUM) meetings, building a forum where utility leaders could share ideas and address challenges together.

Mentorship has been another hallmark of his career. Rich is known for his willingness to share his knowledge generously, guiding countless professionals on their own journeys and helping raise the level of practice across the industry. His influence can be seen in the generations of utility arborists who credit him as both a teacher and a connector.

Rich's contributions have been recognized with honors such as the UAA President's Award and the Texas VMA Lifetime Achievement Award. His legacy endures in the progress of the industry itself and in the people who continue to benefit from his leadership and guidance.

The UAA is proud to honor Rich Hendler with the Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing a career defined by leadership, mentorship, and an unwavering devotion to strengthening the industry.

Congratulations to all of our 2025 UAA Award winners! Your support and contributions to the field of utility arboriculture drive our organization's and industry's excellence, innovation, and impact to our communities. These awards are a way to recognize and honor the tremendous impact these individuals have, which propels us into a brighter future. 🌱

A Warm Welcome, A Grateful Thank You: Our New UAA Board of Directors

On behalf of the UAA Board of Directors (BoD), I'd like to extend a warm welcome to our newest Board Members who started on September 1, 2025:



TROY ROSS
Vice President

Term: September 1, 2025–
September 1, 2029
*President of Vegetation
Management at ACRT Services*



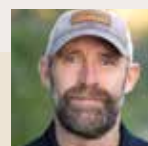
CHRIS KING
Secretary-Treasurer

Term: September 1, 2025–
September 1, 2028
*Director of Operations at
ArborMetrics Solutions*



JASON GROSSMAN
Director

Term: September 1, 2025–
September 1, 2028
*Manager of Vegetation at
Liberty Utilities*



JEFF WISSING
Director

Term: September 1, 2025–
September 1, 2028
*Utility Vegetation Manager at
Holy Cross Energy*

The UAA BoD would also like to express our sincere gratitude and thanks to **Brandon Hughson**, who is finishing his term as Past President, **Sara Dreiser** who is completing her term as Director, and **Kevin Puls** who is completing his term as Director. The BoD would like to give a warm farewell and special thanks to **Jim Neeser** who has completed his term as Secretary-Treasurer after eleven years of dedicated service to our organization. Thank you all for your service.

The BoD would also like to thank everyone who participated in the election this year. The number of dedicated and talented industry leaders and professionals who expressed interest in joining the BoD was a reflection of the importance of the UAA in our industry. Thank you all for your continued interest in the future success of the UAA. A ballot with this caliber of talent was a winning ballot before the election even started. It is the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers and sponsors who continue to ensure the success of the UAA.

In 2026, it is our strategic vision to become the Voice of the Utility Vegetation Management Industry and evolve from a supporting organization to an influencing one. To do this, we will support our membership with four key goals:

1. Educate stakeholders and influence policy
2. Establish standards of excellence
3. Strengthen financial foundations
4. Deepen partnerships

This includes an important focus on championing best practices around topics like outage investigations, wildfire mitigation, technology, environmental sustainability, safety, and also empowering educational programs, increasing PR advocacy, and strengthening the organization to continue to serve our members.

We look forward to a positive and successful year ahead. 🌱

Sincerely,

Kimberly Laing
UAA President-Elect

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WOMEN IN VM



Betsy Long

Powering the Workforce Behind the Scenes

By Betsy Long, Safety Project Manager, Wright Tree Service

As a kid, I wanted to be a nurse, flight attendant, or truck driver. I entered the workforce as a file clerk in the automotive industry. I continued on an interesting career path for more than twenty years before I made my way to the UVM/ arboriculture industry. I have held my current position as project manager on the Safety, Education, and Training team at Wright Tree Service for just over four years now.

Can I just say that I have the best job in the industry? I like being in the background, quietly serving others. Our industry has allowed me to do what I love to do while helping me to grow into a leader and expand my skill set.

My prior roles always revolved around accounting. And because I was taught to look at the financial side of things, my thinking was one-sided—always looking at the money. Having this knowledge has benefited me tremendously in my current role. I truly understand, and this has allowed me to share a proper and appropriate perspective from both ends of the spectrum with both my teammates and my accounting colleagues.

I like solving problems! Not math problems (especially the “new math”) and not the kind of problems that may require pre- or post-nominals attached to my name. I like solving the kind of problems that others might consider small or irrelevant—until they become urgent and frustrating.

I believe I have the unique ability to see things from both the office perspective and the field worker perspective. I listen to others, try to understand the issue, and determine whether I can provide a helpful solution. I ask my teammates outright: *What would help you? What could save you some time?*

I have created many processes and efficiencies for my team and our company. I built a resource library to better connect our team to the solutions they’re searching for. I am thoughtful and intentional in even the smallest details, like file naming and organization. These small details are a really big deal when someone is in the field working and needs info or guidance quickly. Sometimes this is a five-minute training video on how to navigate something in Excel or an hour-long Teams call to help others

understand how to [fill in the blank]. That one-on-one or small team group session creates an effective and lasting learning experience.

Our general foreperson school and project manager school are the highlights of my year. I have worked hard to create an environment where the attendees are comfortable and have exactly what they need to get through the week. On top of that, I try to ensure that the class instructors and facilitators have whatever they might need without even having to ask. From food to accommodations to name badges and lanyards, I work to ensure things go off without a hitch.

This industry is vastly different than any I have ever worked in. I find that people seem happier and are more fulfilled here in the arboriculture/UVM world. I don’t know if it’s because of our pride in our shared purpose—safety—or because more of our colleagues spend time outdoors. Just being in nature is very therapeutic, even while working. Personally, I know my problem-solving has a direct impact on safety and creates ripples in our field, which is a very rewarding and positive experience for me. 🌿

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Mission

We honor American service men and women by organizing volunteer tree and landscape care for the property dedicated to our veterans.

Fort Smith National Cemetery—Fort Smith, Arkansas

Saluting Branches: A Community of Service and Gratitude

By Renée Bissett, President of Saluting Branches, Senior Manager—Strategic Campaigns at The Davey Tree Expert Company

Saluting Branches was founded because a group of altruistic professionals recognized that our veterans gave everything and believed those who served deserve spaces that honor them with dignity, safety, and respect. As tree care professionals, we have a unique ability to honor that sacrifice by using our craft to care for veteran-dedicated properties across the country. Volunteering connects you directly to that purpose while also giving you the chance to grow as a leader, strengthen relationships in our industry, and experience the pride of service beyond daily work. Companies that join in build stronger teams, demonstrate their commitment to community stewardship, and stand out as visible supporters of veterans. Whether you volunteer, contribute year-round, or provide financial support, you become part of a mission that

unites our industry and leaves a lasting legacy of gratitude.

This year, our community came together at over 100 veteran-dedicated properties across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Our volunteers contributed their time, skills, and passion to provide valuable and transformative tree and landscape services. These efforts make a meaningful difference in how we honor veterans and their families. What began as a vision from Rainbow Tree Care has grown into one of the most unique and powerful ways our industry can give back. For more than a decade, Saluting Branches has united arborists, green industry professionals, and countless supporters to serve properties dedicated to veterans. We started at national cemeteries and have quickly expanded to include medical centers, nursing homes, and monuments—reaching more places each year



Riverside National Cemetery—Riverside, California



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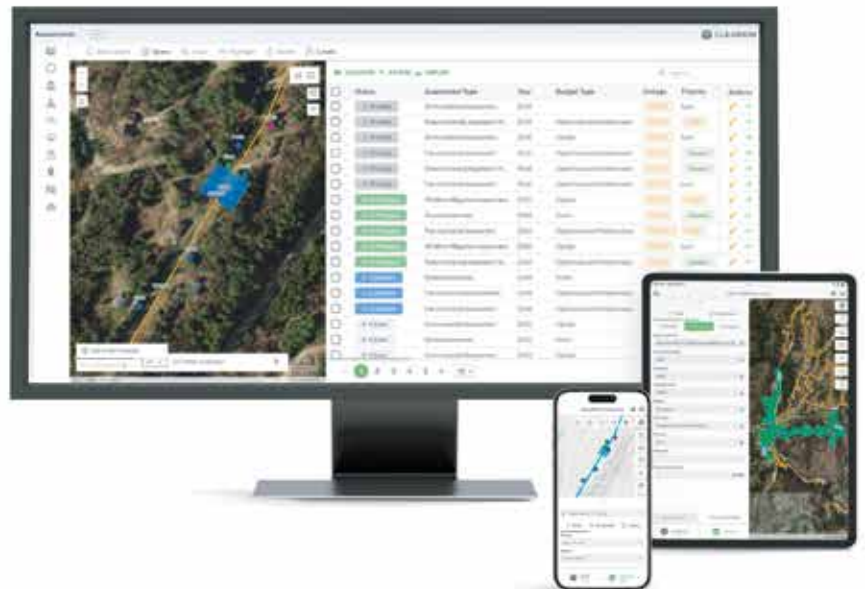
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where our mission is needed most.

This event is far more than a single day. Behind the scenes, volunteers serve on committees, site leaders prepare for months, and sponsors provide the financial and in-kind support that gives us the infrastructure, tools, and resources to succeed. From individuals who donate \$35 to corporations that step up with major sponsorships, every contribution ensures we can provide a safe, well-organized, and impactful experience for our volunteers and the communities we serve.

In our industry, we often find ourselves in difficult situations where doing our jobs—such as removing vegetation and trees to ensure reliable power—can put us at odds with property owners who feel frustrated or upset. But those very same skills, when applied through Saluting Branches, are met with gratitude and respect. Instead of resistance, you are welcomed by the veteran community who sees the work as an act of honor and remembrance. It is a rare chance to take what you do every day and experience the fulfillment of using your expertise for good, surrounded by people who deeply value and support the effort.

This community has shown the power of unity, generosity, and purpose—and our work is not done. Saluting Branches continues to evolve, and we need engaged leaders and volunteers who are ready to shape its future. If you've ever wondered how you can make an impact beyond your daily work, I invite you to step forward. Perhaps it's you who will help lead us into our next decade of dedication.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Renée Bissett is the senior manager of Strategic Campaigns at The Davey Tree Expert Company and board president of Saluting Branches. She brings more than 20 years of industry experience, is a 2019 UAA Education Award recipient, and holds a business management degree from Kent State University. 🌲

THE SUPPORT OF OUR SPONSORS

To every volunteer who gave their time, every company that provided support, and every sponsor who believed in our mission—thank you. Your generosity, commitment, and service make Saluting Branches possible. Visit www.salutingbranches.org to learn how you can volunteer, support, or sponsor in the year ahead.



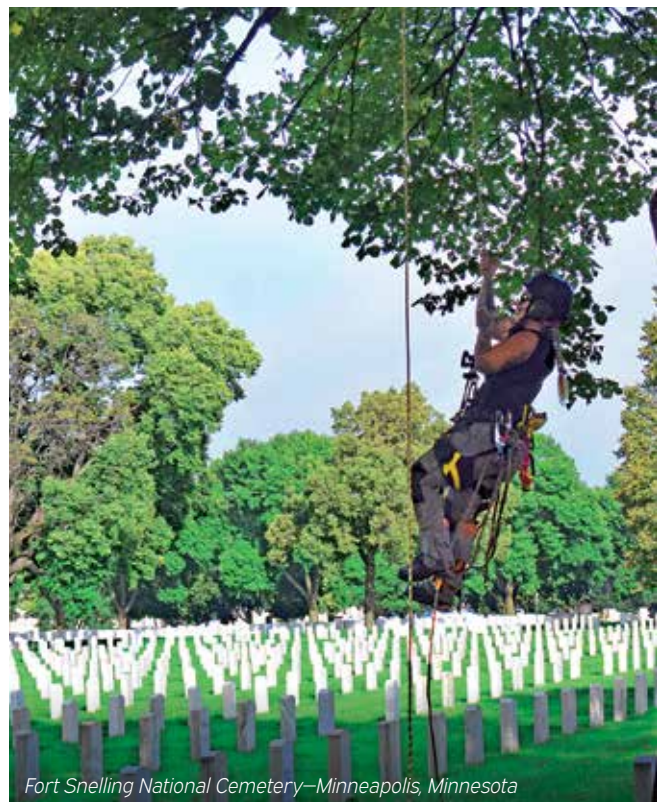
Cathedral of the Pines—Rindge, New Hampshire



Sacramento Valley National Cemetery—Dixon, California



Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery—Newton, Mississippi



Fort Snelling National Cemetery—Minneapolis, Minnesota

•overstory

The Conversations Shaping Grid Resilience

Extrême weather is changing growth patterns and intensifying storms. Reliability demands keep rising while budgets and available crews stretch thinner each year. For utility foresters and arborists, field experience helps minimize outages and keep communities safe.



Overstory develops AI-powered grid resilience intelligence for utilities, but their work always starts with people. Every partnership begins with a workshop, where utility teams map what's working and how better data supports their goals—reducing risk, optimizing cycle programs, understanding tree health decline, or advancing wildfire mitigation.

In subsequent field visits, crews walk flagged spans together with the Overstory team, comparing ground conditions with real-time data. Crews share the trade-offs shaping every decision, surfacing adjustments on risk and prioritization, and ensuring Overstory's analysis reflects operational reality.

At one Canadian utility, a joint walk with transmission and distribution foresters uncovered that each team managed the same spans differently. Because they usually worked separately, the difference hadn't surfaced before. Reviewing results together highlighted the gap and opened dialogue about corridor management. Often, these field visits are the first time teams see satellite-derived insights mapped onto spans they know intimately. Crews validate the analysis, creating a two-way learning process for utility teams and Overstory.

"We listen, contextualize data, and care about translating it into action. The models learn over time as we get more data on your specific network configuration," said Head of Customer Success Lynn Petesch.

Solutions Consultant Phil Chen reiterated, "It feels like a partnership, and utilities don't have to fit their processes to our workflows. We bring collective knowledge on different use cases to each team."

Technology alone can't capture local nuance. Expertise alone can't scale across thousands of miles of line. The combination—crews in the field, tools that learn from them, and shared focus on resilience—is what moves vegetation management forward. 🌲

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A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

An Expanded Two-Part Series!



Surviving Prison to Growing Lives—Trees

By Brian Eubanks, ISA/TRAQ

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Looking at the world through the branches of trees sure beats looking at it through the bars of a prison cell.

From 1993 until January 26, 2003, I was K86378, a gang-validated inmate confined in the California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation (CDCR), mostly in the Corcoran State Prison Security Housing Unit (SHU).

After I was discharged from the military, where I served as a U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman, medical school was the plan. I was going to be a doctor, but my GI Bill wasn't enough. I took a job as a bail bondsman to save the money for UC Davis.

Ignorance of arrest procedures and bad orders led to a \$10,000,000 bail for a kidnapping for ransom charge. After 14 months, \$50,000 on lawyers, and a bail reduction of \$99250,000, I plead guilty to 207(a) of the California Penal Code, “simple kidnapping,” and was sentenced to 12 years and transferred to prison.

I hit four institutions before being sent to the Corcoran State Prison SHU—at that time, America's deadliest prison. According to the FBI, *60 Minutes*, and other media, corruption and abuse were rampant. Guards were setting up and betting on gladiator-style fights between inmates of opposing gangs. Ultimately, the feds assumed control of the prison.

Prison is a horrible place. Trust and believe there are people there that should never be let out. To survive and come out on my feet instead of feet-first, I did what I had to do. In prison, violence is the most important currency there is. I can't paint a picture, I can't sing a song, but I can fight like a windmill in a tornado. I had a better experience than most.



and People Alike

I don't remember how far into my sentence it was when I stopped being the smart, funny, and kind man I once was and turned into a stereotypical convict, but it happened. It became more difficult as the years passed to hold on to hope. I can't remember the exact point in time when I lost hope. But it happened.

Ten years is a long time to sit in a cell. While I sat, the world kept spinning, and it seemed like everything was changing. The internet exploded, everyone got a cell phone, and 9/11 happened. They invented cheese in the crust of pizza. My family and friends changed. Folks died, got married, had kids—life went on.

I paroled out of the Corcoran SHU on Sunday, January 26, 2003. I'll spare the details of how hard it was to adjust to the streets after 10 years in the SHU, but it was tough.

My first green industry job was at a new plant nursery. The transition from medical sciences to plant sciences was exactly what my soul needed. I took to botany, horticulture, and arboriculture like a duck to water. It was the first of the few nurseries I managed while running heavy equipment during the offseason.

In 2013, I became an ISA Certified Arborist. My first job in the utility industry was a three-month gig as a ground guy for a utility tree contract company. I wanted that experience, and the big boss was only too happy to hire an arborist for ground wages.

Since then, I've climbed, consulted, done wildfire work, post-wildfire tree assessments, and quality control for vegetation management on projects throughout the Pacific Northwest.

I married an arborist, and in 2020, we accepted offers from a California utility and moved to Berkeley. During my interview, I told the guy who ended up hiring me that I was a dirty-vest arborist and I'd stay as long as I got to remain in the field. That was four years ago.

In addition to being an arborist, I am passionate about veteran issues. Saluting Branches (www.salutingbranches.org) and raising awareness for veteran suicide and PTSD are at the top of my list.

Earlier this year, I went back to prison, voluntarily. In fact, I go back to a few different prisons as often as I can. I started a program that helps inmate firefighters and veterans navigate the ISA Certified Arborist process in preparation for their release from prison.

Today, I am a quality management auditor for the Vegetation Management Department of the same utility company. I love the important work I am entrusted to do and the people I have the honor and privilege to do it with.

I tell people that the tree industry saved my life—I honestly believe that. I also believe genuine redemption is possible but requires honest reflection, ownership, and actual change. I'll never be a medical doctor, but that's okay. I'm a good man and a good arborist. Tomorrow I'll be better at both. 🌲

A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEWIS SERVICES

From Archeology to Arboriculture: "Digging Deep" to Find One's Calling

By Elizabeth Murray, Marketing and Communications Manager, Lewis Services



Bret Kent

Teambuilding and training sessions often open with ice-breaker games that uncover interesting details about coworkers. Most common is the round-robin sharing of one's name, job title, and a fascinating tidbit of information. Despite the frequency of these exercises, the majority of us still mentally scramble to think

of something unique that will surprise and impress the group: a proud accomplishment (*"I've climbed all 46 peaks in the Adirondacks"*), an exciting announcement (*"We're going to be grandparents!"*), or a piece of personal trivia (*"I played an extra in the movie Happy Gilmore."*).

Bret Kent, senior technical training manager for Lewis Services, can simply point to his resume to reveal an unexpected, super-cool fact: **Kent was once an archeologist.**

Though he has worked in vegetation management for more than a decade, Kent's professional path did not start with climbing trees—but by digging in the dirt. With a bachelor's

degree in history and love for the outdoors, Kent's first career was spent on archeological digs in southeastern parts of the United States, including Georgia, Florida, and Louisiana.

The switch from archeology to vegetation management may seem like an unlikely plot twist, however many of the skills that Kent honed on historic dig sites have proven to be critical assets on job sites. Comparing the two, Kent cites the importance of safety protocols, the correct usage of tools and equipment, and strict attention to detail as shared priorities between the sectors. He also regards honesty, responsibility, and reliability as intangible qualities that are vital across both disciplines.

"Whether you've been tasked with maintaining the integrity of a dig site or testing the integrity of a harness, a great deal rests on your commitment to accountability and following through on what you said you were going to do," Kent said.

A Life-Altering Lesson

Kent's on-ramp to vegetation management was somewhat surprising and swift. With a growing family and the responsibilities that accompany parenthood, Kent knew that spending months on remote dig sites was no longer sustainable. Faced with a new project that would have required six or more months away from home, Kent and his

wife (also an archeologist) made the decision to move their family from Florida to Ohio, where he quickly began a career in the tree industry.

Kent's first job was with a small residential-commercial company, RESCOM, as a climber trainee. After holding leadership positions on archeological sites, starting a new job at ground level (literally and figuratively) could have been discouraging. However, Kent quickly fell in love with the industry and took full advantage of every learning opportunity.

A pivotal point came just weeks into his new career. "The hazards of this industry impacted me pretty quickly when I saw a close call within my first month of doing tree work. A coworker could have died if they had been standing twelve inches to the left. Yet everyone seemed to laugh it off and kept working."

Looking back, Kent knows that his former team understood the severity of the situation, but they had grown desensitized due to their constant exposure to risk. Nevertheless, Kent took the incident very seriously. "From that day forward, I redirected my whole career toward training and safety. It propelled me to where I am now."

Called to Safety

That close call inspired Kent to learn all he could about safety. Leveraging his research roots, he studied safety at a very deep level. He was committed to expanding his own knowledge so that he could teach others. While working his way up the ladder from trainee to trimmer and then crew leader, he was organically pulled into a company leadership role where he was responsible for safety and training. Kent became a de facto trainer and simultaneously created a comprehensive safety policy for the company, developed a standardized training program for new hires, and instituted weekly safety briefs. Kent had found his calling.

After four years with the RESCOM company, Kent joined Lewis Services as a safety specialist. In this role, he has grown as a safety expert and respected leader. Kent's approach to safety draws from his previous career in archeology, time in RESCOM, and an innate sense of curiosity. The culmination of these experiences and methodologies has resulted in an inquisitive, data-probing approach that has served him well.

As a social scientist, Kent studied human activity through the discovery and analysis of artifacts. This scientific process requires patience, keen observation skills, and acute attention to detail. Upon entering the vegetation management sector, Kent quickly discovered that these qualities were relevant and transferrable—especially when applied to Human Performance and safety. Situational awareness, following proper protocol, and personal responsibility are paramount to sending everyone home safely each day.

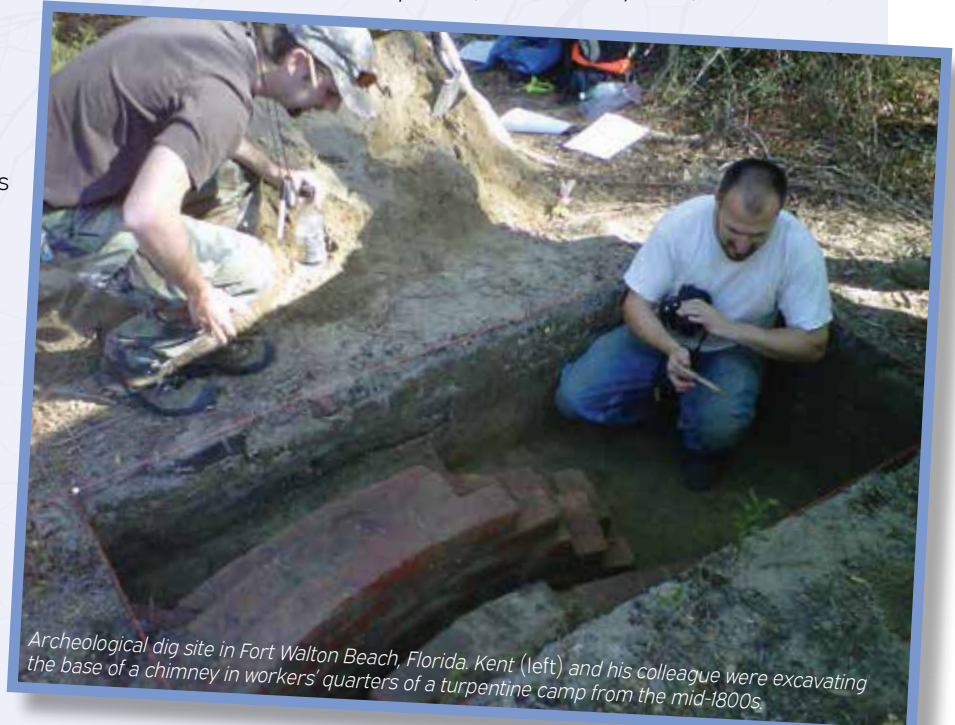
Creating Safe Sites

In 2024, when Lewis Services embarked on a company-wide initiative focused on seven leadership principles, Kent was asked to opine on the principle, "*Do what you say you're going to do.*" Reflecting on his unique career experiences in archeology and arboriculture, Kent emphatically stated, "This principle isn't a casual statement. It is the foundation upon which everything else is built." He continued, "This principle directly impacts daily interactions with coworkers. It drives commitment to customers and the communities we serve. When we *don't* follow up on what we've pledged to do, the consequences can be significant—on an archeological dig, in a work zone, or any critical setting."

So how does this principle come to life each day in any work setting? As a safety expert and trainer, Kent ranks reliability as a critical component. Similar to earning trust, reliability must be consistently demonstrated before it's believed. Team members depend on clear, consistent communications from leadership and coworkers, and must be able to trust that the information they're given is complete, correct, and timely. A breakdown in communication can have dire results in vegetation management.

As a safety expert and social scientist, Kent knows that—as humans—we're going to fail sometimes. We're going to miss a deadline, make a faulty assumption, or take a shortcut. Some of these missteps will be completely unintentional while others may be due to lack of time, competing pressures, flawed prioritization, and even excessive confidence. Kent believes that in vegetation management there is a dangerous space where crew members are confident enough in their skills to not need supervision all the time—but don't yet have the experience to appreciate why certain procedures are in place.

He explained, "Workers may think,



Archeological dig site in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Kent (left) and his colleague were excavating the base of a chimney in workers' quarters of a turpentine camp from the mid-1800s.

A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

'I can skip that step because I'm experienced now.' In reality, that overly confident perspective is a step onto a slippery slope that can lead to devastating consequences."

A Culture of Accountability

While mistakes will inevitably occur at some point, a true measure of character is how those missteps are acknowledged and fixed. Kent reflected, "Part of being reliable is not shying away from our mistakes but owning them. It's how you carry yourself forward from that point that really matters."

Kent is proud to help create this culture of accountability. He appreciates the role he plays in operations and safety, and he does not take his responsibilities lightly. With professional and personal conviction, Kent seeks to move the needle on safety and accountability, not just because it's his job but because it's his passion—and because that's what he said he is going to do.

Kent admitted, "The road from archeology to vegetation management may be a little uncommon, but in both roles, I've approached each day with this question: *'How can I make a positive impact today?'*"

Regardless of one's personal path to UVM, that's something we can ALL relate to. 🌱



Bret Kent

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For nearly nine decades, Lewis Services has served its customers with dedication, reliability, and commitment to a Job Done Right. As the demand for electricity increases at unprecedented rates, Lewis has worked to distinguish itself as a leader in the utility vegetation management sector. Earlier this year, Lewis Services received prominent recognition for a different achievement: **national certification as a Minority-Owned company.**



At the National Center for Employee Ownership's annual conference, NCEO Executive Director Loren Rodgers announced the historic creation of three new purchasing preference certifications and identified Lewis Services as **the first 100% employee-owned company to earn national certification as a Majority Minority Employee-Owned business.**

Pursuing this accreditation was a top priority for Lewis Services. "Achieving national certification as a Minority-Owned business was important for Lewis on many levels," Lewis CEO Leslie Kass explained. "More than 61% of our employee-owners proudly identify as Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, and/or People of Color—so minority certification is an authentic reflection of who we are as a company and community partner."

Kass continued, "This certification is also something that our utility partners have been strongly asking for because it helps to fulfill their community impact goals as well. Utility companies are increasingly committed to creating a positive impact at the local level and often seek out diverse suppliers like Lewis to ensure they are building a resilient supply chain that strengthens the communities where they operate."

Lewis Services has been **100% employee-owned for 25+ years** and serves as one of the largest 100% employee-owned companies in the United States. With a majority-minority workforce of 4,000+ employees across 28 states, Lewis is proud of the localized impact that employee-ownership has generated in the communities where our teams work and live. To learn more, please visit www.lewisservices.com and follow us on LinkedIn and Facebook. 🌱



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2023-2024 PinE Award Recipients

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Companies that go above and beyond to support our mission will be recognized annually through our Partners in Excellence (PinE) Program.

Membership, sponsorship, advertising, active committee volunteerism, and many other means have been quantified and assigned a value, all adding up to equal a PinE Score.

All applications and supporting material of qualifying companies are reviewed and selected by the PinE Committee.

We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our PinE Award Recipients.

Your continued support of the Utility Arborist Association is greatly appreciated on many levels.

PLATINUM AWARD



GOLD AWARD



SILVER AWARD



BRONZE AWARD



RESEARCH CORNER

It's Back with a Special Two-Parter!

VERY POOR

POOR

GOOD

EXCELLENT

Assessment of Skills Needed in Entry-Level Urban Foresters in the USA

By the UAA Research Committee, and Seth Blair, Research and Development Manager, Eocene Environmental Group

Returning from a long hiatus, the UAN's Research Corner is back with two new installments, and more to come from the UAA Research Committee.

This summary is based on peer reviewed research by Dahle et al. (2020) published in *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* (DOI: 10.1016/j.ufug.2020.126694).

Keywords: important-performance analysis, knowledge, urban forestry, skills

CHALLENGE

Urban forestry (UF) is a highly specialized profession, regularly interfacing multiple levels of both science and management. Assessments of arboricultural worker skills are not indicative of the skills required of an entry-level urban forester. To provide a trained and competent workforce, universities, organizations, and companies must first understand strengths and weaknesses in employee development.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

The study aimed to analyze the importance of skills relevant to entry-level UF positions and assess their presence in the workplace.

PROCESS

Two surveys were conducted in 2015 and 2016, capturing responses from 91 of the most populous municipalities in the United States and 325 additional responses from smaller municipalities and the private UF sector.

Respondents ranked the importance and presence of 60 skills related to urban forestry, forestry, arboriculture,

management, communication, and public administration. Scores were derived to categorize skills in one of four categories: *Concentrate Here*, *Keep Up the Good Work*, *Low Priority*, or *Potential Overkill* (Figure 1).

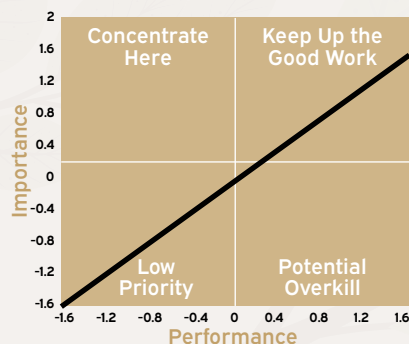


Figure 1. Importance-performance analysis categorizations used in Dahle et al. (2020)

RESULTS AND APPLICATION TO UVM

Respondents most valued the International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist credential, as well as urban forestry, forestry, arboriculture, and horticulture degrees. Degree programs seem to provide adequate preparation for most arboriculture skills. The same applies to one-third of urban forestry skills, particularly those focused on management.

Some skills of high importance and high performance included urban forestry management, inventory technology, GIS, vegetation control, tree ID, and pruning and removal. Only one skill, social media, was

categorized as *Potential Overkill*.

UVM departments, particularly entry-level positions, have extensive interaction with the public. This study found that interpersonal communication skills were either near or within the *Concentrate Here* category, suggesting a potential focus area for employee development. Tree Risk Assessment skills were also near the *Concentrate Here* category, a frequent and critical responsibility of entry-level UVM field staff.

Areas of lower importance and performance applicable to UVM include both resiliency, and disaster and utility management skills. The former is central to successful storm restoration for UVM. Only 6% of the respondents identified as utility managers, thus demonstrating that there are likely additional skills that an entry-level utility urban forester might need that a municipal urban forester does not.

While managerial skills may be of low priority for most entry-level positions, low performance in contract administration, business management, and project management may signify the need for on-the-job training throughout the progression of one's career.

CONCLUSION

Urban forestry is a specialized field that needs targeted education and training to be effectively staffed. This study provides insights that can help align academic curricula and professional development with industry needs. ‡

Factoid Friday: A Commitment to Professional Development

At Iapetus Infrastructure Services (IIS), we believe that knowledge is one of the most valuable tools a utility arborist can carry. That belief inspired **Factoid Friday**, a weekly educational series created three years ago by Shane Camozzi from Atlas Field Services.

Camozzi started the series to make learning both interesting and practical for his team. Each Friday, he delivers a concise, engaging snapshot of a topic within the arboriculture and utility vegetation management industry, which covers everything from technical practices to environmental considerations. His goal was simple: to create a learning tool that would spark curiosity. As Shane explained, "When you put in the effort to foster the development and growth of the employee, the employee, company, client, and the industry all



benefit. It is a win-win for everyone."

What began as a small team initiative quickly expanded. Today, Factoid Friday is shared with supervisors across the country and colleagues who look forward to each new edition. Over 150 facts have been created, building a library of knowledge that continues to inspire. Many readers have gone on to pursue ISA certification or other credentials, crediting Factoid Friday for igniting that journey.

IIS is now working with the International Society of Arboriculture to approve Factoid Friday editions for CEU credits, which further underscores its value as a tool for professional development. From a single idea to a nationwide resource, Factoid Friday reflects IIS's commitment to workforce education and industry growth. 🌱

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And more!



RESEARCH CORNER

Borrowed Credentials and Surrogate Professional Societies: A Critical Analysis of the Urban Forestry Profession

By the UAA Research Committee, and Julian Picciano, Arborist, Eversource Energy

This summary is based on peer reviewed research by O'Herrin et al. (2023) published in *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry*.

Keywords: green industry, professional credentials, professional organizations, professionalization, public image

OBJECTIVE

Urban forestry is an emerging field yet to develop a strong professional identity. Spanning multiple disciplines, UF professionals often rely on related fields for industry support mechanisms. The authors suggest that UF may have fragmented standards and identity, hindering efficiency and professionalism. The objective of this research was to create a "practical ideal type" industry to benchmark against the current state of UF.

METHODS

A literature review was conducted to determine how a modern profession should look. The status of UF was then derived from a literature review, document analysis, survey analysis, and author observations.

RESULTS

Successful modern professions are defined by eight ideals, five of which relate to workforce development.

Body of Knowledge

A profession's body of knowledge (BoK) should be accessible, current, research-driven, guided by a professional organization, and integrated with education and credentialing systems. While various entities produce research and publish findings in peer-reviewed journals,

consistent knowledge transfer in UF is not evident. Multiple organizations steward the BoK but typically do so from their own perspectives.

Higher Education

Accredited programs should apply the BoK, uphold educational standards, and align curricula with industry needs.

The Society of American Foresters and Canadian Forestry Accreditation Board now accredit UF programs, but to a lesser extent than traditional forestry programs. UF is included as an accreditation subcategory rather than its own fully developed program. There is little evidence that employers and professional organizations are discussing the relationship between curricula and job needs.

Credentialing

Credentialing should be practitioner-driven, set competency standards, uphold ethics, and enable self-regulation.

Urban forestry professionals use various credentials to demonstrate professionalism that are often based in allied professions or locale specific. Consequently, occupational standards for entry into the UF profession are lacking.

Recruitment

Recruitment should target youth and underrepresented groups through coordinated efforts among educators, employers, and professional organizations.

Students in higher education lack awareness of UF, as recruitment typically relies on traditional forestry channels. This has resulted in poor workforce diversity. While

recruitment programs exist that bring awareness to UF, none serve as a direct recruitment pipeline or career pathway program as some do in the field of arboriculture.

Retention and Advancement

Outlining career growth depends on tracking employment trends, defining advancement, and aligning professional development with workforce needs.

Inconsistent usage of "urban forestry" and "arboriculture" definitions impede employment analyses. Further, the arboriculture sector demands more entry-level positions than UF. Career progression is unclear compared to other professions and few professional development programs exist.

APPLICATION TO UVM

Utility vegetation management, a sector of urban forestry, stands to benefit from self-evaluation against a practical ideal type of profession as outlined in this research. By adopting unified credentialing systems and aligning educational programs with industry-specific needs, UVM can enhance professional standards and workforce preparedness. Improved recruitment strategies and clearer career pathways will help attract and retain talent.

CITATION

O'Herrin, K., C.G. Bassett, S.D. Day, P.D. Ries, and P.E. Wiseman. "Borrowed Credentials and Surrogate Professional Societies: A Critical Analysis of the UF Profession." *Arboriculture & UF* 49, no. 3 (2023): 107-136. <https://doi.org/10.48044/jauf.2023.009>.



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SAFETY TOOLS

Committed to Safety: Achievements, Goals, and the Road Ahead

By David Hawley, Outgoing Chair, UAA Safety Committee

Hello, UAA Members! It is David Hawley, and I am honored to be the Chair of the UAA Safety Committee. Here we are heading toward the end of 2025. I want to take a quick moment and thank the amazing people who serve on the UAA Safety Committee. They share a tremendous passion for safety and a compassion for humanity I've been repeatedly humbled to see and be a part of.

This past year has been one of significant progress for the UAA Safety Committee overall. I want to also share that I have stepped down as the chair at the end of October. I am truly proud to announce Liz Westburg has accepted the gavel as chair of the UAA Safety Committee for the coming year. Her contributions to this committee and to the safety culture of this industry are commendable. We know she will be an amazing success. As she takes this position, we will work with her on building a stronger safety culture as well as continually supporting the growth of safety in this industry.

With all of that said, let me take you through a recap of our key initiatives and achievements in 2025.

Addressing Violence in the Field and Focus on the Hazards

Tragic incidents of violence focused on tree worker jobsites have deeply impacted our community. In response, the UAA Safety Committee has issued a call to action, highlighting existing safety resources and conducting periodic reviews of our resources, particularly following electrical service events, like storms or sustained outages.

Protecting workers from violence is everyone's job. We want to provide the most up-to-date information and tactics to our team members. We aim to share these this year. We feel this

is meaningful and important work. Members of our committee held webinars and spoke at key stakeholder meetings throughout the year promoting the understanding of this challenging problem and the best ways to protect craftworkers.

Navigating the Realm of Radio Frequency Safety

One of the primary challenges we continued to face in 2025 was understanding the safety risks and best practices associated with radio frequency (RF) exposure. We dedicated substantial effort to developing a strategy for educating our members about these risks. This involved intensive research, expert consultations, and the creation of a communication tool to disseminate this vital information. We are continuing the journey of evaluating the best way to present the findings. We hope this work will pay off as we dedicate ourselves to produce a safety notification on some best practices associated with working around RF for the industry.

Safety Perspectives and Defining "Safety Differently" and "New View Safety" (Safety-I to Safety-II)

Our committee also made strides in advocating for Safety Differently and New View Safety paradigms. These concepts emphasize viewing workers as potential problem-solvers rather than merely a problem to be fixed. The New View Safety approach delves into understanding the context of work and situations that lead to incidents.

Several of our members have actively promoted these concepts within the industry, fostering a culture that seeks deeper insights into the Safety Differently cultural shift.

As part of the Safety-I to Safety-II integration, we are exploring the shift from traditional safety metrics to more holistic approaches to define true safety performance. We are partnering with the UAA Events Committee and the UAA safety summit programs to broaden the understanding and implementation of these strategies. This is truly a place where we are driving to make a difference for the industry. I am very excited about this work and look forward to the committee's investments in this area going forward into 2026.

Creating an Arborist-Relatable Energy Wheel Initiative

The introduction of the Energy Wheel has been a new cornerstone of pre-job briefing process improvements. This tool aids in the identification of hazards associated with stored or potential energy in the work environment. We are exploring an Energy Wheel training tool specifically tailored for arborists. We are committed to its widespread adoption and are exploring ways to integrate it more effectively into our safety programs. We believe it is a game-changer in supporting the accurate and better-defined identification of hazards to workers. We are proud of our committee members who have actively promoted these concepts within the industry. We are looking to incorporate these concepts of the Energy Wheel in

upcoming lectures, panel discussions, webinars, and safety summits.

Driver Safety Efforts, Benchmarking Technology, and AI Tools in Fleet Safety Management

We are aware of the unique dangers associated with driving-related tasks. We are working hard to develop a strategy to create industry best practices around driver monitoring technology. We are working to develop a benchmarking survey to gather insights on how industry leaders utilize remote sensing software and AI to monitor driver behaviors. We aim to leverage the shared knowledge and technologies to enhance driver safety comprehensively. On the topic of distracted driving, we are working to develop best practices and leverage technology to mitigate hazards associated with driving tasks. This includes creating a benchmark study and survey to understand current industry practices. We are looking for

support from the industry as we dive deep into the various methods used by fleets throughout the industry to protect the drivers and the public.

Standards and Industry Involvements from the Standards Community

Throughout the year, our committee closely monitored the progress of the Z133 rewrite for 2025 and provided updates to our members. Additionally, we engaged in the ANSI 92.0 aerial lift updates. Many of our members play an active role in the Utility Line Clearance Safety Panel (ULCSP). We feel, as a committee, we must contribute meaningfully to these important discussions. Our members have provided presentations at UAA safety summits on matters being discussed in the industrial standards community. There is no shortage of passion and engagement from the talented and committed safety professionals on the UAA Safety Committee!

Safety Tools for the Newslines and Communication Initiatives

Our Safety Tools initiative for the *Newslines* will continue into 2026, covering topics such as workforce retention, environmental stewardship, disaster response, and legislative outlooks. These tools will provide actionable safety knowledge to our community. We are always looking for folks willing to share their knowledge and skills in support of this effort.

As we look forward to 2026, we are confident that our collaborative efforts and innovative strategies will continue to enhance safety across the utility vegetation management industry. Thank you for your dedication and constant striving for never-ending improvement. Let's continue to advance our shared mission for a safer work environment for our craftworkers.

Think safety, talk safety, and stay focused. 📌



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Servant Leadership in Utility Vegetation Management: Empowering Teams for Success

By C. Troy Ross, Vice President of the UAA, and President of ACRT Services

On a chilly Monday morning, a utility vegetation management crew gathers for their weekly briefing. Instead of launching into instructions, their supervisor begins by asking each team member how they're doing. One mentions a child's illness, another shares excitement about a certification course they just completed, and another raises a safety concern from last week's job. The supervisor listens closely, takes notes, and makes commitments to follow up. Only then does the conversation turn to schedules and project updates.

This moment may seem small, but it illustrates something powerful: a leader putting the needs and voices of the team first. In an industry where disengagement, high turnover, and the pressures of managing a distributed workforce are constant challenges, this approach isn't just compassionate, it's strategic. It's servant leadership in action.

Putting People First

Employees and vendors consistently say they want more than just fair pay. They seek fairness, empathy, a sense of purpose, and opportunities for growth. These expectations echo Maslow's hierarchy of needs: only when individuals feel safe, supported, and valued can they truly invest in higher-level goals like achievement and self-actualization.

What they want from leaders is equally clear. They look for support that goes beyond empty promises—leaders who not only listen but act on what they hear. They want accountability, consistent communication, and recognition for their contributions. They want training that invests in their future and a safe work environment where they can thrive. In short, they want leaders who are present, accessible, and committed to their success.

Redefining Leadership

Traditional leadership often emphasizes authority and control. The traditional leader is the one doing most of the talking—focused on personal success—and measuring performance primarily through numbers. Leadership, in this model, is a badge of accomplishment.



Servant leadership flips this script. Servant leaders listen actively, empower their teams, and measure success not by their own achievements but by the growth and well-being of the people they serve. They see leadership not as a destination but as an act of service, a responsibility to uplift others and help them reach their potential.

The Traits That Matter

The best servant leaders lead by example. They inspire not through authority but through humility, accountability, and influence. They are clear and positive communicators, strategic thinkers, and collaborators who prioritize people first. Empathy, stewardship, and a commitment to others' growth define their actions. In many ways, they act as coaches, guiding individuals toward success while building the collective strength of the team.

These qualities make servant leaders more than managers. They are catalysts for transformation, creating workplaces where people feel supported and valued. And as research shows, this style of leadership produces measurable results.

Why Servant Leadership Works

The business case for servant leadership is compelling. Companies that embrace it see turnover drop by a quarter, while employee retention and morale rise. Engagement skyrockets: 70% of employees report higher satisfaction when their leaders practice servant leadership, and those employees are fourteen times more likely to stay with their organizations.



The benefits don't stop there. Customer satisfaction increases by 20%, workplace conflicts decrease by 15%, and organizations report innovation scores 33% higher than peers. Productivity improves too, sometimes by as much as 30%. These results prove that servant leadership is not just about being kind, it's about creating the conditions for sustainable performance.

Building a Culture of Service

Of course, adopting servant leadership doesn't happen overnight. Leadership expert Rick Conlow outlines a path forward that begins with defining what servant leadership means within your organization. Leaders and employees alike need education and training to understand how philosophy applies to their roles.

From there, companies must assess their culture, gathering feedback through surveys and focus groups to understand current strengths and weaknesses. Once that foundation is in place, leaders can set clear goals and metrics that align with servant leadership principles.

Training and development play a central role, ensuring that both leaders and team members are equipped to practice empathy, empowerment, and



open communication. Empowerment is especially critical; it means giving employees ownership of their work, trusting them with decision-making authority, and backing that trust with resources and support.

Most importantly, leaders must lead by example. Servant leadership cannot be a program layered onto an existing culture; it must be a way of doing business. Leaders show its value by demonstrating empathy, listening actively, and prioritizing the needs of their teams in tangible ways.

A Leadership Philosophy for Today

The workplace is changing. Remote and hybrid work models, technological innovation, and shifting employee expectations have transformed how organizations function. Employees want careers that feel purposeful, not just transactional. They want to know their leaders see them as people, not just workers.

Servant leadership meets these demands. By prioritizing growth and well-being, it creates environments where people feel valued and empowered. It fosters loyalty, encourages innovation, and strengthens resilience. In doing so, it transforms companies into communities where employees are not just surviving but thriving.

Conclusion

The Monday morning supervisor who starts with listening rather than directives may not make headlines, but their impact is meaningful. Servant leadership is built on moments like these: small choices that add up to a culture where people come first. It is leadership that redefines success, shifting the focus from authority to accountability, from control to empowerment, and from individual achievement to collective growth.

In today's business climate, servant leadership is not simply a noble ideal—it is a practical necessity. Organizations that embrace it gain not only happier and more engaged employees but also stronger performance, greater innovation, and long-term resilience. The leaders who succeed in the years ahead will be those who understand that true leadership is not about being served but about serving others to unlock their fullest potential.



About the Author

C. Troy Ross is the president of vegetation management at ACRT and ACRT Pacific. Since joining ACRT in 1999 as a contract utility forester, Ross has advanced through increasingly senior leadership roles, supporting vegetation management programs for a wide range of utility types and organizational structures.

He is the current UAA vice president, a former UAA board director, and was recognized with the UAA Utility Arborist Award in 2023 for his contributions to advancing utility vegetation management. Ross holds a Bachelor of Science in organizational leadership from Union University and a Master of Business Administration from Ashland University.

Reference [WifiTalents](#), 2025 🌿



Caring for Our Employees as Elite Athletes

Working in the green industry is a difficult job that requires focus, coordination, dexterity, and strength. Data shows that the majority of OSHA recordables are soft tissue discomforts like twisted ankles, minorly injured fingers, and other strains and sprains that can hinder safe work performance. Safety is a core value at Davey, and the leaders are introducing programs and initiatives to reduce the number of work-related discomforts.

Davey piloted the multifaceted Industrial Athlete Program, launched in California offices in 2023.

The program boosts safe work performance to Davey professionals, such as injury prevention and intervention, ergonomic corrections, nutritional advice, and sleep hygiene.

Other related programs, like Stretch and Flex and the Davey Fit Program, target specific parts of the body frequently used by field crews. On-site prevention training focusing on joint range of motion and tissue extensibility provides a hands-on approach to restore and maintain necessary mobility for optimal movement. Program practitioners also visit field crews on-site to demonstrate ergonomic corrections and provide observational advice.

The Industrial Athlete program expanded to Florida in June 2024 and into Ontario, Canada, in November 2024, with eight practitioners running the program. The program also expanded its preventative measures by offering functional movement screenings at other Davey-coordinated training events outside of the pilot program areas in California. These screenings measure an employee's flexibility, mobility, and motor control to help practitioners develop individualized recommendations for exercises. Davey invested in a dedicated training facility at the Livermore campus, designed with sports performance and recovery equipment, which allows practitioners to run assessments and provide coaching in a convenient space.

Since the program's beginning, 2,865 employees have worked with Industrial Athlete program practitioners via initial encounters, follow-ups, or preventative measures. What started as a program targeted at tree climbers on the West Coast has since expanded into several regions in North America and to multiple disciplines, such as landscaping, tree climbing, and environmental work, highlighting Davey's commitment to the health and safety of its employees. 🌿



SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Cultivating the Next Generation of Utility Vegetation Management Professionals

By Phil Swart, Chair of the UAA Professional Development Committee, and Regional Account Manager, ArborWorks

On a cold November morning, veteran crews in bucket trucks fan out under a gray sky, trimming back ice-loaded limbs to restore power. That scene is only possible because years ago, they decided this was more than a job—it was a career worth building. As a volunteer chair for the UAA Professional Development Committee, I've seen firsthand that workforce development isn't just about filling positions. It's about cultivating professionals who safeguard communities, strengthen our grid's resiliency, and carry forward the values of safety, stewardship, and innovation.

For me, this conversation always comes back to education. And let me be clear: education is not the same thing as a degree. Too often, we equate "education" with formal schooling, when in reality, education is a lifelong endeavor. Every time we pick up a new skill, try a new method, or adapt to new technology, we are learning. Proficiency doesn't come from a certificate alone. It comes with repetition, time in the field, and mentorship. That distinction matters because if we want to grow our workforce, we must value both classroom learning and the countless ways knowledge is built on the ground.

UVM has always been a people-driven industry. It takes skilled hands, sharp eyes, and steady judgment to balance vegetation management with reliability, safety, and environmental stewardship. Trees are living and ever-changing, which makes this work as much an art as a science. But like many professions, we're facing a generational shift.

As Lew Payne (NYPA) has said, the second generation of UVM professionals—the individuals who built our modern programs and practices—is beginning to phase out. With them goes not only years of service but also a tremendous body of hard-earned knowledge. If we don't capture and pass down that knowledge, we risk losing lessons that were paid for in time, experience, and sometimes hardship. Documenting, sharing, and mentoring across generations must be one of our highest priorities.

I recently asked my LinkedIn network what form of education they saw as most vital for the next generation of UVM professionals. The results painted a clear picture: 37% chose on-the-job learning, while mentorship came close behind at 28%. Degrees and certifications (21%) and technology tools like AI (14%) earned their place but didn't lead the pack. The message was clear: this industry thrives on experience and guidance in the field, supported by credentials and technology that provide structure and scale.

That insight underscores the need for visibility and pathways. Many of the next UVM professionals aren't in our workforce yet. They're in middle and high school classrooms, and they'll bring a level of digital fluency and innovation that will push our industry further than we can imagine. It's up to us to make this profession visible, to demonstrate that this is a career worth choosing.

We're already working to make that vision real. The UAA Professional Development Committee is building resources like a bilingual glossary of industry terms, making technical language more accessible to crews and foresters across the world. We've also restructured the committee to be more member-driven because workforce development must reflect the voices and needs of everyone in this profession, from the tree crew groundman to the utility VM manager.

Innovation plays a role here too. The newest generation of vegetation management professionals are already integrating technology into the field in ways that weren't possible a decade ago. Artificial intelligence and large language models (LLMs) are among the newest tools in our belt. While they may feel abstract, these tools are already streamlining workflows: drafting reports, summarizing regulations, generating training materials, and freeing up time for experts to focus on teaching, mentoring, and planning. Like the chain saw, AI doesn't replace expertise; it amplifies it. It creates more opportunities for experienced professionals to pass on their knowledge while giving younger workers new tools to innovate.

But at its core, workforce development isn't about tools or credentials—it's about people. Many of us didn't plan to work in UVM. Someone opened a door, and we walked through it. What keeps us here isn't just a paycheck; it's a sense of purpose. For some, it is ensuring grid reliability, keeping power flowing to homes, hospitals, and schools no matter the weather. For others, it's environmental stewardship, restoring ecosystems and biodiversity in our rights-of-way. For many, it is crew safety, building a culture where every worker goes home at the end of the day. These reasons are deeply personal, but they share one truth: this work matters. Helping new hires and students see that impact—that legacy—is one of our most powerful recruitment tools.

As members of this profession, it's our responsibility to nurture that sense of purpose, to capture the wisdom of those who came before us, and to teach the "why" behind every technical skill. We need to adopt new technology not as a gimmick but as a tool for safer, smarter work. And we must welcome the next generation into a profession where they can see themselves making a lasting difference.

Workforce development isn't optional. It's the root system of everything we do. Every storm we respond to, every fire we prevent, and every outage we avert is proof that investing in people is the best resiliency plan we'll ever have. The future of this profession is already here—in classrooms, on crews, and in the stories and skills passed down from one generation to the next. Together, let's invite the next generation to choose vegetation management with the same passion and purpose that brought you here. 🌱



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Working Woods Hub: A Case Study on Partnering to Grow Resilient Forests in Ohio

By Becah Troutman, Working Woods Hub Manager, The Holden Arboretum

Forests are a vital part of our landscape—and our legacy to leave for the next generation. But they are also under increasing pressure from invasive species, pests and pathogens, climate change, development, and unsustainable management practices. These challenges are especially pronounced in Ohio, where it is estimated that pre-1800s there was 95% forested land. Currently, there is an estimated 30% forested land, and of that, 85% of those forests are privately owned. That means the future of our forests depends not only on partnerships, science, and policy but on the thousands of landowners who care for the woods in their backyards and beyond.

After hearing about the need for forestry education from the community and partners, the Working Woods Learning Forest was established in 2017 at The Holden Arboretum. The 70 acres of land are a living laboratory and demonstration site where landowners and professionals can see forest management in action and learn how to care for their own unique woods. Building on this strong foundation, we saw the need to expand our impact beyond the arboretum's boundaries.

In 2024, with support from a \$1.8 million USDA Forest Service grant, we launched the **Working Woods Hub**—a regional effort growing a network of people, programs, and practical tools designed to address the real-world challenges of forest stewardship and land management. Our overarching goal is clear: to empower people to manage, protect, and create resilient forests in Ohio. We do this through four core components: outreach and events, consulting forestry services, the Working Woods Learning Forest, and the Holden Seed Bank.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HOLDEN ARBORETUM

Working Woods Hub Team

WORKING WOODS OUTREACH

Outreach and education are at the heart of the Working Woods Hub. Through tours, seasonal workshops, webinars, and community events, we connect landowners, natural resource professionals, and community members with the information and experiences they need to better understand forest ecology and management.

Our outreach team strives to equip landowners with the knowledge and tools they need to effectively manage their forests in ways that are reciprocally beneficial for both the landowner and the forest they steward. Our programming covers topics such as woodland stewardship basics, invasive species management, timber sale administration, and cultivation of non-timber forest products. If there is a forest-related topic you want to know more about, chances are we can either teach you about it or connect you to someone who can!

Learn more about the importance of forest cover, forest ownership, and forests in your state. Scan here!



CONSULTING FORESTRY

When it comes to forests—whether you're dealing with invasive species, curious about improving your wildlife habitat, or ready to develop a full-fledged forest management plan—a forester is there to help. Typical services of a consulting forester include site visits, customized land management plans, forest farming consultation and technical assistance, carbon market enrollment, timber harvest administration, and more!

Because we saw a need in Northeast Ohio for forest education and consulting forestry, we designed a program to help landowners navigate big decisions, make

To find forest resources for your state—such as how to contact your state forester, forest best management practices, and state management plans—scan here!



Working Woods Hub Team

the most of their forest's potential, and chart a course that balances ecology, enjoyment, and economic value. In 2024, Holden launched **Holden Arboretum Consulting Forestry**—a program designed to provide personalized, one-on-one support to landowners throughout the Ohio region. This represents the exciting and natural next step for our work in forest management and outreach: to take our expertise and lessons learned to private landowners who steward Northeast Ohio's woodlands.

Forestry professionals can help unlock your forest's potential while ensuring its health for generations to come, no matter where you are on your woodland journey. A great first step is reaching out to your state forester or local forestry professional to set your woods on the right path.

WORKING WOODS LEARNING FOREST

At the core of the Hub lies the **Working Woods Learning Forest**, a 70-acre demonstration site within Holden Arboretum that has served as a living laboratory since 2018.

Here, we show how sustainable forest practices look in real time. Landowners, forestry professionals, and the general public are invited to experience working woodland firsthand through tours and programs. Management techniques demonstrated at the site include:

- **Single-tree selection harvests** to improve stand health and biodiversity



Single-tree selection harvests to improve stand health and biodiversity

- **Group selection harvest** to mimic natural disturbances and encourage regeneration
- **Timber stand improvement cuts** that encourage the growth of desired species
- **Invasive species removal** to improve native regeneration
- **Non-timber forest products**, like mushroom logs and edible and medicinal plants



Non-timber forest products, like mushroom logs and edible and medicinal plants

- **Long-term research plots** monitoring forest changes over time

The Learning Forest hosts many of our outreach events and serves as a research hub where students, professionals, and scientists gather data on forest dynamics, understory vegetation, and even native bat populations. This research helps shape regional best practices and ensures our recommendations are rooted in science.

HOLDEN SEED BANK

The **Holden Seed Bank** is a support pillar of the Working Woods Hub. It serves as a source of genetically diverse native trees and shrubs, offering locally adapted seedlings to support reforestation and restoration projects. As more landowners create climate-smart forest management plans, the Seed Bank is preparing to provide the high-quality seed or plants needed to bring those plans to life.



TOGETHER WE GROW

The challenges facing our forests are real—but so are the opportunities. With the Working Woods Hub, Holden Forests

& Gardens is building a supportive, science-informed, and people-powered network to meet those challenges head-on. Partnerships are central to this work: by collaborating with the government agencies, other nonprofits, local organizations, and landowners, we are combining expertise and resources to create meaningful impact. These partnerships ensure that no one is working in isolation and that every effort contributes to healthier, more resilient forests across Northeast Ohio and beyond. If you're ready to take the next step in caring for your woods—or just want to learn more—help is out there. By working together, we can turn today's forest challenges into tomorrow's success stories.

To Learn more about the Working Woods Hub at Holden Arboretum...

Visit holdenfg.org/wwhub to access resources and learn more.

If you find yourself in Northeast Ohio, the Working Woods Learning Forest is open for the public with admission to The Holden Arboretum. If you have a group that would like a tour, reach out to forestry@holdenfg.org. And if you'd like to connect with the author to brainstorm how to implement a program like this—or discuss other ideas—please contact Rebecah (Becah) at rtroutman@holdenfg.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Becah in her natural habitat: the woods.

Becah Troutman holds a Master of Science in biology and has built her career around land management, with experience ranging from invasive species control and rare plant monitoring to large-scale

restoration efforts. In her current role as Working Woods Hub Manager at Holden Forests & Gardens in Northeast Ohio, she has expanded her focus to forestry. There, she leads initiatives that empower landowners and communities to manage, protect, and create resilient forests through the partnerships and education. 🌲

Who's Who of Tree Work

Sometimes the hardest part for an individual who wants to do right by their land is just getting started. One of the points of education we like to get across at the Working Woods Hub is who to reach out to for help and get started. Knowing where to start and the difference between these roles can be a difficult nuance to the public or a landowner; there is some overlap between these positions, and this list is not all encompassing, but it is a great resource to get you started in the right direction.

	What They Do	When to Reach Out
Arborist	A professional who specializes in the care, maintenance, and health of individual trees. Arborists focus on pruning, diagnosing diseases, managing pests, and ensuring trees are safe and healthy in urban or landscaped environments.	When you have questions about the health, safety, or aesthetics of individual trees, need pruning, or suspect a disease or pest problem.
Consulting Forester	A paid professional who provides expert advice on forest management to private landowners, organizations, or government agencies. They develop management plans; offer guidance on timber harvests, wildlife habitat, and sustainable forestry practices; and may oversee projects to meet the client's ecological and economic goals.	When you want a management plan for your property or need guidance on harvesting timber, improving forest health, or enhancing wildlife habitat.
Service Forester (Depending on your state, also called Division, County, Stewardship, or Area Forester)	A professional forester employed by a state agency (often within the Division of Forestry or Natural Resources) who provides free or low-cost technical assistance to private landowners. They help with connecting landowners to additional resources. They do not typically buy timber or manage sales directly, but instead act as trusted advisors to ensure sustainable forestry practices.	If you are a landowner seeking initial guidance on how to manage your woods, write a forest stewardship plan, understand cost-share opportunities, or need help connecting to resources. An excellent first point of contact when you're beginning to explore forest management options.
Logger	A skilled worker or business that harvests trees for timber or other forest products. Loggers typically handle felling, processing, and transporting logs, often following sustainable forestry practices or under the guidance of a forester.	When you are ready to harvest trees, thin a stand, or remove timber for economic or management purposes, ideally under the guidance of a forester or management plan.
Technical Service Provider (TSP)	A professional or company that delivers specialized technical services, often under contract. In forestry or conservation contexts, a TSP might assist with site assessments, invasive species removal, or implementing best management practices.	Contact a TSP or vendor when you need technical assistance on your project. A forester will often prescribe this in your management plan and sometimes act as a project manager with the TSP.

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Professional Utility Vegetation Management Credentialing Program

What, Where, When, Who, Why, and How

By Susan Barrett, Professional Development Program Manager, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

What

A comprehensive, project-based training program led by industry professionals.

- Gain knowledge and skills to plan and manage sustainable utility vegetation management programs
- Courses cover safety, integrated vegetation management, project management, and corridor planning
- Program includes: Foundations Certificate, UVM Professional Certificate, and UVM Program Planning Credential

Where

- **100% online** via Canvas with flexible, self-paced weekly requirements

When

- **Next Start:** January 5, 2026, for UVM 1: North American Electrical Systems. Registration closes **December 15, 2025**.

Who

- Open to anyone (no degree required)
- Best suited for professionals with utility/arboriculture experience
- Ideal for those pursuing management or leadership roles
- Reading and writing intensive—strong time management and communication skills recommended

Why

- Graduates report:
 - ~ Stronger leadership credibility
 - ~ Improved UVM program operations (more proactive, less reactive)
 - ~ Direct application of coursework into workplace systems
- Employers benefit from ready-to-use reports and registers created by participants
- Builds confidence and career advancement opportunities

How

- **Weekly expectations:** Read modules, join discussions, submit project tasks, and complete a final project
- **Time commitment:** 8–15 hours/week
- **Financial support:**
 - ~ Scholarships available (California + bordering states, via PG&E and the UAA)
 - ~ Many utilities cover tuition for employees

Learn More and Register: uwsp.edu/uvm

Scholarship Info: uvmscholarships.org

Hear What Graduates Have to Say About the Professional Utility Vegetation Management Credential®



Sarah Hendrix, 2024 Pro-UVM Graduate—California

Sarah is a senior utility arborist at Southern California Edison, based in Central California, and oversees UVM field operations in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. With over 10 years of experience in the UVM industry, she holds several ISA certifications, including Utility Specialist, Arborist, and Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ).

She is passionate about minimizing the impact of hazardous trees and implementing integrated vegetation management methods. A dedicated goal-setter, she actively seeks continued education opportunities in UVM. In her free moments, she loves to immerse herself in family adventures, chasing after her energetic toddler, and creating cherished memories together.

"I was initially hesitant to take on the challenge of completing the program while managing a full schedule and a new baby. However, the support from knowledgeable peers and real-life work examples made a significant difference. This rewarding experience allowed me to explore various aspects of UVM beyond my daily duties and engage with industry leaders. It has motivated me to continue my professional growth and attend industry events. I highly recommend this program."

Liz Westberg, 2024 Pro-UVM Graduate—Minnesota

Liz Westberg began her career as a wildlife ecologist, earning her Bachelor of Science from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. She later transitioned into utility arboriculture, where she holds both the ISA Utility Specialist and Professional Utility Vegetation Management credentials. As a business developer at Growth Solutions, Liz has worn many hats, spanning operations, quality assurance, safety, technical training, and now business development. A passionate educator and advocate for safety, she has presented at industry events nationwide. In 2024, Liz was honored with the Utility Arborist Association's Will Nutter Silver Shield Award for her contributions to safety in the field.



"I pursued this certification because I realized just how vast and complex the utility vegetation management industry really is and wanted to learn more. Through discussions and coursework, I gained a deeper understanding of the key factors that influence vegetation management decisions. I believe that this has also made me a stronger partner to the utilities I work with, and I have confidence that I could step into a utility vegetation manager role myself someday. I also had the chance to connect with other professionals looking to grow in the field, many of whom I remain in contact with."

Julius Uehlein, 2024 Pro-UVM Graduate—California

Julius is a vegetation management operations manager at Pacific Gas & Electric. He is a utility arborist, a father, a veteran, and a leader in the utility vegetation management space. He loves spending time outdoors with his wife Julie and two kids, Penny (four years old) and Max (six years old).

"The Professional Utility Vegetation Management Professional Certification Program stepped up my game in the industry. I left the course with a leadership mindset and the project management tools to be successful in any leadership role in the UVM space. The courses offer a solution to anyone who wants to promote into leadership but cannot find a good path forward."



Anthony Lindfors, 2025 Pro-UVM Graduate—Alaska

Anthony currently serves as a vegetation management inspector with Matanuska Electric Association. He has 16 years of experience in the vegetation management industry, with the last 13 at MEA. He is an ISA Certified Arborist and Utility Specialist, and also holds a TRAQ qualification and is a Certified Utility Vegetation Management Professional through the Utility Arborist Association.



"The Utility Vegetation Management Professional Development Program is one I would recommend without hesitation. It is an engaging opportunity that challenges participants while connecting them with outstanding peers and leaders in our profession. This program elevated me as a professional, served as a supporting catalyst for change in our region, and helped me build lasting industry connections. It is a unique and invaluable experience well worth the effort."

- It is an engaging, invaluable program that elevated my professionalism and connected me with leaders across our industry.
- The program challenged me, expanded my network, and became a catalyst for positive change in our region.
- I would recommend Pro-UVM without hesitation—it is unique, invaluable, and well worth the effort." 🌱



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A New Chapter of Service, Collaboration, and Growth

What's on the Horizon for the International Society of Arboriculture

By Sharon Jean-Philippe (PhD), ISA Board President

It is with deep gratitude and great excitement that I step into the role of president of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Board of Directors. Following in the footsteps of Dr. Tom Smiley, whose leadership has strengthened our organization and advanced the ISA mission, it is both an honor and a responsibility I accept with enthusiasm. Tom's steady guidance and commitment to excellence have left a legacy, and I look forward to building upon the strong foundation he and ISA's other past presidents helped shape.

As we enter this next chapter together, I am looking forward to working with you. Your daily work as utility arborists and vegetation managers—ensuring the safe and reliable delivery of essential services while maintaining the health and integrity of vegetation management—is critical. You operate at the intersection of infrastructure and nature, often under challenging conditions, and your expertise is a cornerstone of public safety and canopy stewardship.

The ISA, in part through our relationship with the Utility Arborist Association, is committed to supporting your work, advocating for your

professional needs, and ensuring that your voices are heard and valued within our organization. Together, we will continue to create more opportunities for growth, collaboration, and meaningful impact across the profession.

Advancing Our Mission Through Strategic Collaboration

As ISA continues to evolve, I am especially proud of the recent approval of an updated ISA Chapter, Associate Organization and Professional Affiliate Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the ISA Board of Directors. The MOU reflects thoughtful feedback and input from many of our partners, including the UAA. I want to thank the UAA and others who contributed to this process. Your insights helped shape a more inclusive and responsive framework for how ISA engages with its professional affiliates. The outcome is a clearer path forward, one that respects the unique contributions of each organization while aligning us more closely in service to our shared goals, industry professionals, and members.

Together, we have a real opportunity to advocate more effectively for urban

forestry and vegetation management, particularly in a time when funding challenges threaten many of the programs and services impacting our communities. Whether it's ensuring proper tree care in underserved neighborhoods, responding during storm events, or maintaining utility corridors safely and sustainably, our work has never been more critical—or more visible.

We will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that arboriculture and urban forestry professionals are not only recognized for their expertise but also supported through the tools, training, and resources needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Investing in the Future of Arboriculture: Student and Early Career Engagement

Another priority of the ISA Board of Directors is deepening ISA's engagement with students and early career professionals. They are the future of our field—and we must ensure that they are welcomed, supported, and empowered from the very beginning of their journey.

We are already seeing growing interest from young people who are drawn to

careers that combine hands-on work with environmental impact. Arboriculture and urban forestry offer tangible ways to address and mitigate urban issues and make our cities enjoyable to live in.

But interest alone isn't enough. We must continue to invest in mentorship programs, affordable credentialing pathways, scholarships, and networking opportunities that help students and emerging professionals not only enter the field but thrive within it. One mentorship program to highlight is the UAA Future Leaders Initiative Program (FLIP), where students were provided financial assistance to attend the Trees & Utility conference to learn more about career and research in utility vegetation management. ISA and its partners like the UAA will continue to develop these opportunities to continue to provide early career engagement touch points.

ISA 2025 in Christchurch, New Zealand

One of the most exciting milestones was our ISA Annual International Conference and International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC) held in Christchurch, New Zealand, on October 19–22, 2025. It

was a privilege to welcome our global ISA community to New Zealand.

Christchurch has undergone a remarkable transformation in the past decade—rebuilding itself as a resilient, green, and forward-thinking city. It was a fitting host for the ISA 2025 Annual Conference where we explored innovative approaches to arboriculture, urban forestry, and plant health. I was especially excited about the opportunities this location provided for cross-cultural exchange and learning.

We were also thrilled to bring the International Tree Climbing Championship to this beautiful setting. Few events showcase the skill, athleticism, and spirit of camaraderie in arboriculture as vividly as ITCC. It's a celebration of the work we do and the people who do it—and it was a joy to cheer alongside you as we watched almost 100 talented climbers from around the world compete in one of arboriculture's most exciting events.

A Community Rooted in Passion and Purpose

What unites us across continents and career paths is our shared belief in the

power and importance of trees—and the people who care for them. Whether you are managing storm response in a local community, crafting management plans for utility right-of-ways, analyzing soil composition for urban plantings, or leading a municipal tree board, your work matters. And at ISA, our work is to support yours.

Over the coming year, I am excited to travel, listen, and learn from many of you directly. I want to understand your challenges and celebrate your successes. I want to hear how ISA can continue to serve you better, and how we can grow together to meet the needs of our changing world.

We are an organization rooted in science, strengthened by service, and driven by community. The ISA Board, and the ISA staff team that helps power the work of our organization, are committed to upholding these values and working in partnership with each of you and with the UAA.

Thank you for your trust, your passion, and your commitment. I look forward to what we will accomplish together! 🌳



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Building a Sustainable Workforce Development Strategy That Fosters Growth

If your workforce development efforts feel like an endless cycle of recruiting, educating, and replacing for the same jobs year after year, you're not alone. High turnover and constant retraining keep you stuck trying to maintain an even keel instead of building sustainable growth. Perseverating over checking boxes and job descriptions may leave you with a candidate that's perfect on paper but not quite right for your team. Before you know it, you see negative growth. Worse, you may find yourself looking to fill your most critical field positions yet again.

But at ARBORMETRICS, we know that true workforce development isn't about hiring rock stars—it's about recruiting for fit and developing people with the right mindset into skilled professionals. The key is finding humble, hungry, smart candidates who align with our culture and offering them clear and consistent personal and professional growth opportunities. When you invest in people from day one and with intentional training frameworks, you don't just fill positions for a season. You foster long-term employee retention and loyalty that translates into business impact.

That's why we are hyper-focused on talent recruitment, development, and advancement. The result? Team members who are more engaged, more likely to stay, and who become our most valuable industry connections. Our workforce development program specifically offers:

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UVM AND THE LAW

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Protecting Small Species in Big Utility Corridors

By Alejandra Rodriguez, UVM Program Student, Tulane University Law School



In *Tennessee Valley Authority v. Hill*, the Supreme Court issued a decision that seemed almost unbelievable. In that 1978 decision, the court stopped the nearly completed Tellico Dam project because its operation would wipe out a tiny endangered fish called the “snail darter” (*Percina tanasi*). That ruling made clear that under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), even a small, relatively unknown species could halt a huge public works project. For those in utility vegetation management, that case continues to echo across daily workloads. Corridors that carry electricity and keep the grid reliable often overlap with habitats for rare plants, pollinators, and animals. The law tells us those small species matter as much as the big projects running through such territory.

The ESA doesn’t just apply to national parks or wetlands. Its reach extends to any project or activity that could “take” a listed species. The term “take” doesn’t just mean killing a single protected animal or plant—it includes harm through habitat destruction. That means when crews clear vegetation, mow access roads, or remove hazard trees in rights-of-way, it is possible that you could be operating inside potentially protected habitat. If protected species are present, heavy-handed work could trigger liability, project delays, or costly mitigation. The ESA doesn’t include a “good intentions” exception. Compliance requires knowing where sensitive species live and working around them without causing harm.

Utility arborists are often caught in the middle. On one side is the clear duty to manage vegetation for fire prevention, reliability, and safety. On the other side is the duty to protect biodiversity under laws like the ESA. This balancing act can feel impossible. But *TVA v. Hill* teaches that courts interpret the ESA strictly—protecting species usually outweighs the convenience of completing or maintaining a project. That doesn’t mean utilities can’t do the work; it just means utilities must do it carefully, with awareness of what protected species might be living in the corridor.

In practice, sensitive species can include more than just animals. Rare plants, wildflowers, and even pollinators like monarch butterflies or certain bumblebees are now part of the ESA conversation. Rights-of-way can act as surprising conservation zones, providing the open sunlight and diversity of plants that species need. Clearing and mowing, if done smartly, can maintain that diversity instead of destroying it. The same corridor that prevents outages can also serve as a pollinator superhighway if crews think in terms of selective management instead of blanket removal.

So what can utility arborists do to stay out of trouble and support conservation at the same time?

1. **Know the corridor.** Work with supervisors to obtain maps or data on sensitive species in your area. Many states keep databases that utilities and their contractors can access.
2. **Get training.** Learn how to identify protected species known or suspected to live in the area where you work. Remember that all kinds of living things—including plants, animals, and insects—can be protected under the ESA.
3. **Spot and save.** When you or your crew see unusual plant clusters or wildlife signs, flag them. Reporting back can make a difference before the next sweep.
4. **Use selective practices.** Instead of broad clearing, consider targeted removal of hazard species while leaving compatible vegetation intact.
5. **Time your work.** Nesting seasons and bloom cycles matter. If possible, align routine maintenance with times when disruption is lowest.
6. **Document everything.** Photos and notes of conditions before and after work show good faith if questions ever arise later.

This is not just about legal compliance. Crews who know their land also build stronger community trust. When neighbors see utilities and their crews protecting wildflowers, milkweed, pollinators, or bird habitat, they’re less likely to

resist needed line clearance work, and that can make the rest of your job easier to accomplish.

In California and a few other states, governors sometimes suspend environmental requirements during declared wildfire emergencies. These suspensions can temporarily ease the pressure on utilities, letting them bypass certain reviews or permits to act quickly in high-risk zones. For example, vegetation removal in sensitive habitats might move ahead without the normal layers of state environmental sign-off.

For arborists, this can feel like a green light to clear aggressively. But there's a catch: gubernatorial suspensions usually apply only to state environmental rules—they **do not** override the federal ESA. Even if a governor suspends state habitat protections, the federal duty to avoid harming endangered species still applies. Cutting through habitat for a listed plant without precautions could still put the utility at risk of ESA enforcement.

Suspensions can also create confusion. One week, crews may be told to clear as fast as possible; the next, regulators may return with normal requirements back in force. The practical advice is to treat suspensions as temporary breathing room, not a free pass. Continue to apply selective practices and document careful decision-making. That way, when rules return, your work will stand up to scrutiny.

The snail darter may seem far removed from your UVM

work, but the principle is the same: big projects don't cancel out small species. Courts and regulators have made clear that protecting biodiversity is not optional. Temporary environmental suspensions may adjust timelines or paperwork, but the underlying duty remains.

For arborists, the lesson is about mindset. Approach each corridor not just as a line to be kept clear but as habitat that must be balanced with reliability. Look for ways to integrate fire safety and conservation. Arborist duties include acting as a steward of the landscape.

As wildfire risk places more pressure on utilities, conflicts between the need for line clearance and sustainability will increase. Legislators may pass new liability protections for utilities, and governors may make pushes to speed mitigation. But the values underlying the ESA aren't going away. Protecting species is part of the American legal landscape.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alejandra Rodriguez is currently in the UVM program and will complete her juris doctorate at Tulane University Law School in May 2026. 🌱



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OPINION EDITORIAL

Through a Newcomer's Lens: Appreciating the Full Scope of Utility Vegetation Management

By Jackson Hall, Corporate Communications Intern, Davey Tree Expert Company



Jackson Hall

Before I entered the utility and tree care industry, I knew trees had leaves and powerlines provided, well, power. Other than that, I was bringing my high school science education and two years as a journalism major at Ohio State to a communications internship.

Like many people, I thought “tree care” was just trimming branches and pruning. Which, yes, is certainly part of it. But I quickly

realized that barely scratches the bark of what the green industry covers.

When most people think of tree work, they picture crews with chain saws keeping branches off powerlines. Within my first weeks, I learned the industry stretches much farther. One of the first tasks on my to-do list was understanding the many service lines: residential tree care, commercial landscaping, utility vegetation management, and consulting utility arborists. And even that framework doesn't capture everything.

I was surprised to discover the environmental consulting side of the industry with projects like wetland restoration, invasive species management, and GIS mapping for utility corridors. Seeing how these initiatives support both utilities and ecosystems made me realize this work isn't just about trees, it's about entire communities and landscapes.

Another part that stood out was the industry's commitment to training and safety. I had the chance to visit new spaces dedicated to hands-on learning with non-energized utility lines and classrooms for technical instruction. It showed me that safety isn't just policy, it's built into the culture.

The technical knowledge has been eye-opening, but what impressed me most were the people. Whether they were climbing, researching, or teaching, everyone I met carried a strong sense

of pride. I expected to feel like an outsider as a journalism student, but instead I found people eager to explain their work and connect me to the bigger picture.

Most of my job was taking in information and figuring out how to translate it into stories. At first, I was surrounded by terms I didn't understand, but what always stood out were the human parts: pride in the work, excitement about new projects, and the constant focus on safety. Those stories carried just as much weight as the technical details.

Looking back, this experience changed the way I think about careers. I used to assume the green industry was reserved for people who studied forestry or biology. Now I see how much room there is for different skill sets from research and technology to communications and beyond.

If another student asked me about interning in this field, I'd tell them not to worry about coming in with all the answers. Curiosity goes further than expertise. Ask questions, listen closely, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you can learn and feel part of the work.

I started the summer thinking tree care was mostly about trimming branches. I'm ending it knowing it's about people, science, safety, and the stories that connect them all. 🌳



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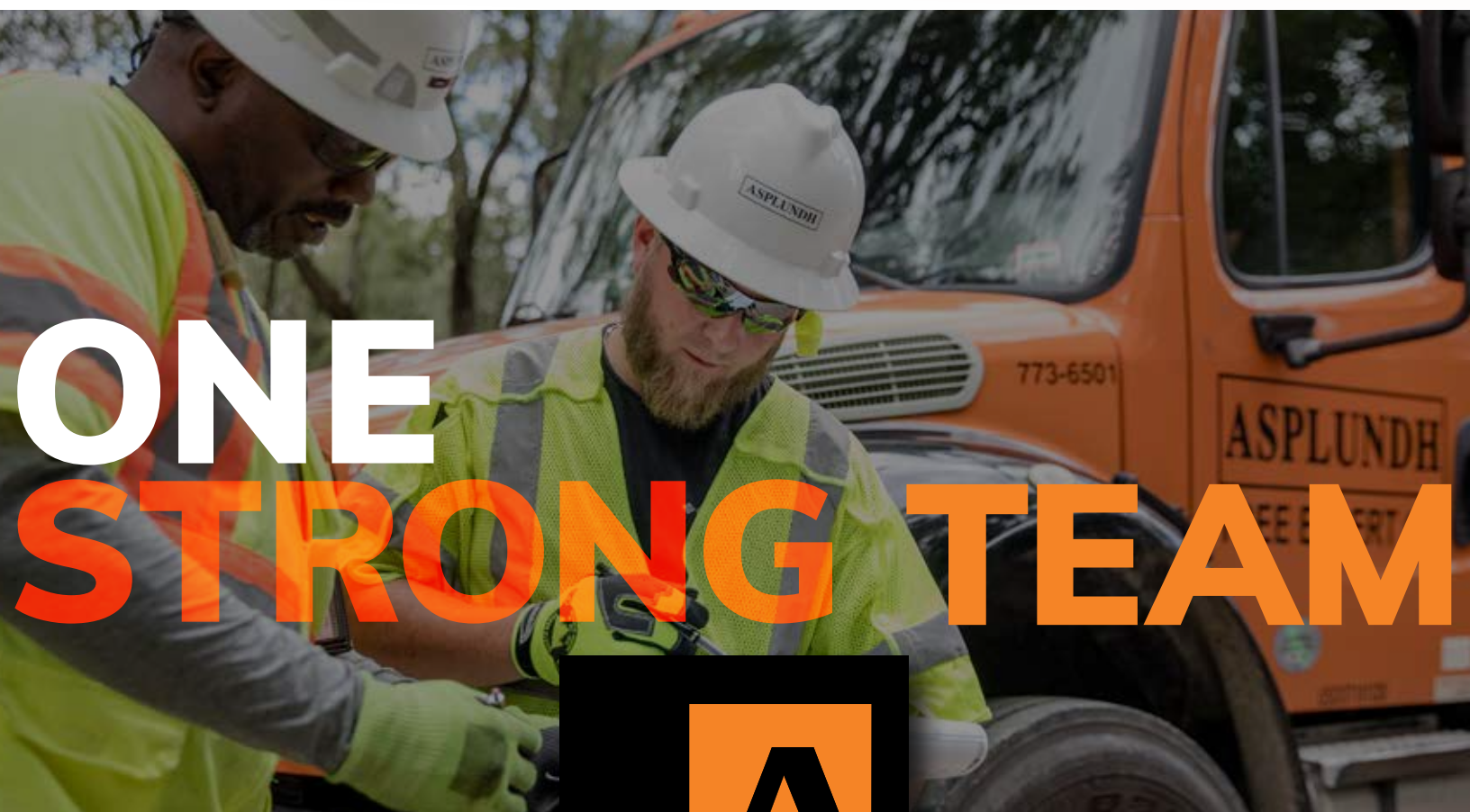


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