

NOV.DEC 2024

Volume 15

Number 6

UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON A YEAR IN REVIEW

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The Utility Arborist Newsline is published bi-monthly by the UAA 2009 W. Broadway Ave., Suite 400, PMB 315, Forest Lake, MN 55025
ISSN Print: 2770-5927 | ISSN Digital: 2770-5935
Cover Photo: © Heidi Felberg

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Turn to **page 20** to see this year's winners of the UAA Awards.



Read about the dedication of Saluting Branches in honoring our fallen heroes on **page 34**.



Learn how to attract more women to the UVM industry on **page 46**.

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

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
- Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)
- Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Rights-of-Way (ROW)
- Subject Matter Expert (SME)
- Transmission and Distribution (T&D)
- Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)
- Vegetation Management (VM)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Matt Goff



A Year in Review

By Matt Goff

Greetings to all of you. As 2024 ends, I hope the year has been good for you and those important to you. How time flies, and I feel we would be remiss without pausing to recognize some important occasions which have occurred in 2024.

First, let me reiterate what an honor it is to serve as the UAA President for 2024–2025. It seems like just yesterday in 2019 when I began my tenure with the UAA as a director. My first exposure to the UAA as an organization came in 2018 when I attended Trees & Utilities in Kansas City. I knew then that I wanted to support this organization and the work it does to grow and advocate for the vegetation management industry.

The 2023 Trees & Utilities Conference set a then record for attendance at 1,015 attendees. Coming out of the pandemic era, the event in 2021 included 540 attendees; so, 2023 and 2024 show clearly that we are moving beyond those times and are indeed growing. In fact, two prior to the 2024 Trees & Utilities in Fort Worth, Texas, the conference had already secured more than 1,000 registrants, so it is likely to surpass the Pittsburgh event! This is a testament to you, the members, to our incredible staff at the UAA, and to our strong alliance with the Arbor Day Foundation.

I hope you had the opportunity to attend our 2024 Vegetation Managers Summit hosted by Holy

Cross Energy in beautiful Glenwood Springs, Colorado. The event was attended by more than 70 vegetation management professionals at a lovely location in the mountains of Colorado. Many thanks to Jeff Wissing with Holy Cross, the Summit Planning Committee, and UAA staff for coordinating such an impactful event. The 2025 event is in Kalispell, Montana, co-hosted by Flathead Electric Cooperative and Bonneville Power Administration. Contractor safety, hazard tree program elements, and contract consistency were all topics discussed at the event.

August 27, 2024, marked the annual UAA business meeting. I encourage everyone to watch the recording of the meeting if you missed it live. The meeting is a great synopsis of the annual accomplishments of the UAA. It is also the formal changing of the guard for our volunteer officers and Board of Directors. To be honest, we would love to have more live guests attend so mark your calendars for the 2025 meeting when that information is available. The Board works for its members and your engagement, fellowship, and input is highly desired.

One essential element discussed at the annual meeting is the five-year strategic plan for the UAA. The strategic plan includes goals supporting leadership development in our industry, goals for advancing the PUVM curriculum, goals for strengthening external engagement

with affinity groups, and goals for promoting the belief that energy infrastructure corridors be considered assets and should be managed as such.

2024 has truly been a remarkable year that no one will soon forget. I offer a few of the following statistics for members to reflect upon:

- **6,866:** Total members and growing
- **7,514:** Total views on YouTube
- **1,914:** Total attendance for events
- **215:** CEU (Continuing Education Units) hours offered
- **190:** Sessions offered across the county
- **663:** Attendees of our webinars

In conclusion, I want to reiterate what an honor and privilege it is to be elected President of the UAA. If you were able to attend the 2024 Trees & Utilities, you may recall the themes I discussed at the awards luncheon. Internationally, regionally, and locally, the Utility Arborist Association is the premier advocate and champion of every vegetation management professional.

I remain steadfastly committed to that vision, and I commit to each of you that I, as President of the UAA and after my term, will always advocate for the incredible individuals who make up the vegetation management profession. †

Matt Goff

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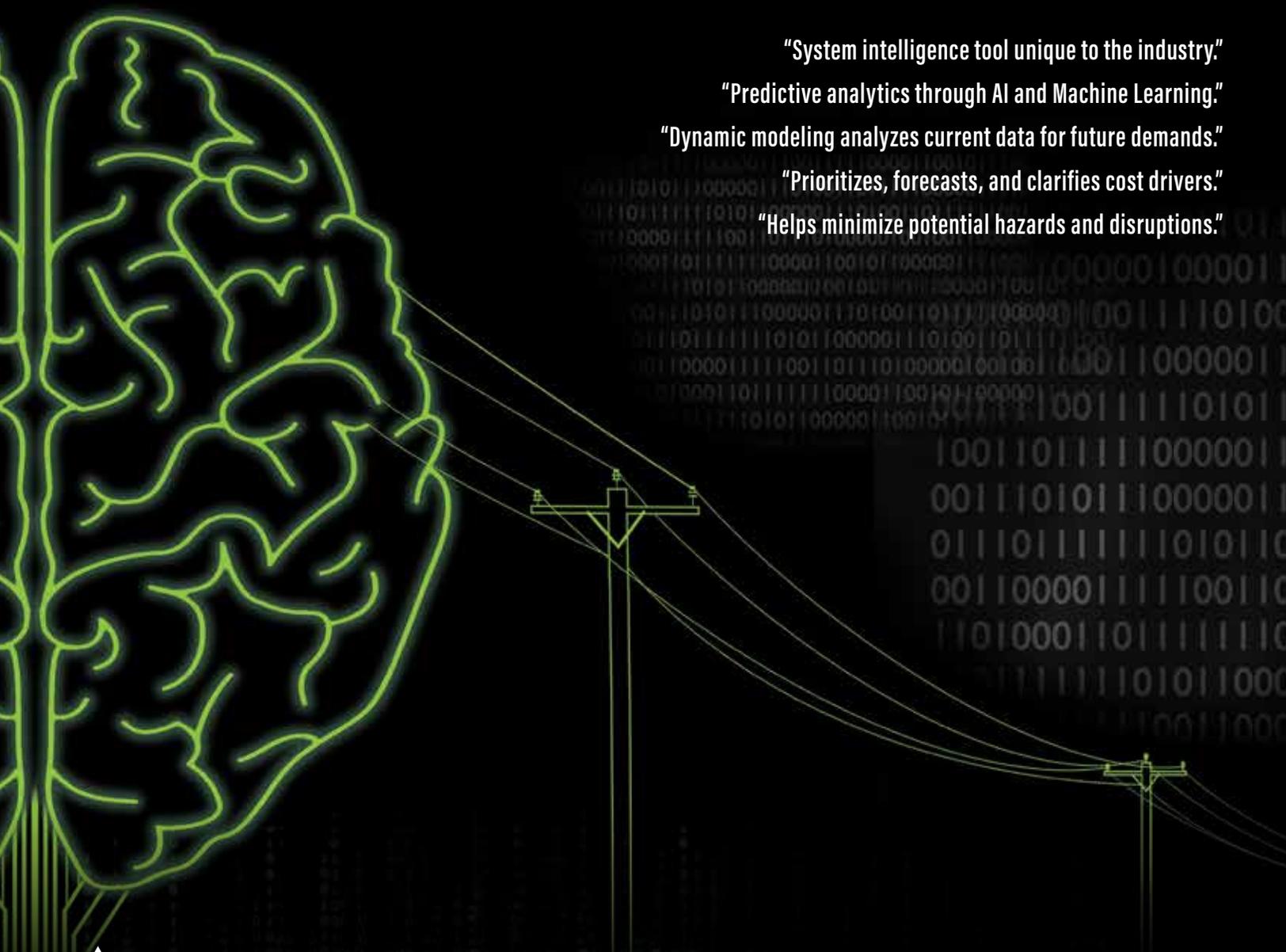
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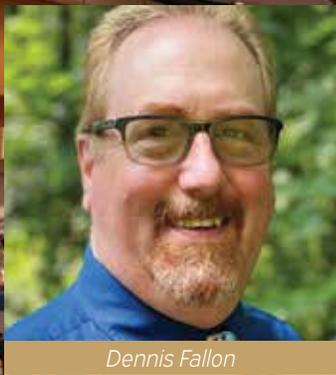
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon



When I was asked to put together a year-in-review themed message for this month's *UAN*, I looked to my notebook to remind me of what might be worth highlighting. I didn't even get through February's notes before filling half a page of relevant things that have happened this past year—from Board of Directors' actions, volunteer engagement, UAA engagement with external and new audiences, to hiring new staff. 2024 was a great year for the UAA, and important work was done that should set a nice foundation for future growth.

An area of emphasis from the Board's strategic planning session in May 2023 was focusing on "growth" through external awareness of our organization—and grow we did.

When EPRI reached out to ask us about a third-party certification for pollinator habitats on ROW, a group of subject matter experts was gathered. That group was able to use known research and documented outcomes to help EPRI draft language better to align with UVM practices. The group was able to influence change in a positive manner.

Another group of volunteers was able to identify existing regulatory language around high-visibility clothing which speaks to the percentage of coverage rather than a specific area of coverage. If successful, this group will be able to affect changes in the high-visibility

clothing OSHA standards that are not equitable to all body shapes. Having safety gear that fits the worker well is important as we seek to increase industry recruitment to attract new audiences to our workforce.

The organization was well represented in the ANSI Z133 consensus standard review and, specifically, the electrical hazard section was updated to help bring clarity and improve safety around electrical hazards. The organization was contacted by a firm assisting the U.S. Department of Labor in updating the language in section 37-3013.00, Tree Trimmers and Pruners, in their online system, O*NET. Owning our industry's terms and definitions allows us to advance our safety, recruitment, and professionalism as a whole, and the UAA is committed to all three of these areas of advancement.

The Board also had some key inward-facing strategies to implement this year. In March, the Board brought a change in the UAA bylaws to the membership who voted to adjust language around a director's eligibility to run for a second term without a waiting period. The group also moved to push archived *Newsline* editions outside of the member paywall to the public-facing UAA website to raise awareness of our professionalism by increasing access to our content. We also hired a partnership coordinator, Samantha (Sam) Wilson, to seek out funding opportunities and strengthen

the organization's partnerships.

The UAA committees and other volunteers have also been hard at work in 2024. Some of the highlights include the completion of a Spanish language style guide to be used for consistent translations and resource creation. We held six regional meetings, the ever-growing Trees & Utilities Conference, the UVM Summit, multiple webinars, and participated in multiple other events and learning opportunities. We are exploring opportunities in education by seeking to transition the Pro-UVM Credential to college credit for future participants; modernizing the delivery of the Pro-UVM courses; enhancing train-the-trainer opportunities; and exploring enhanced pesticide applicator training to more effectively implement IVM strategies. And we have been the voice for arborist safety as new sources of non-ionizing radiation EMF continue to appear in our worksites.

We can be proud of where our organization has been and where it is going. I am excited for what 2025 brings in continued growth of our organization as well as increased recognition outside our current circle of friends. Thank you to all our members, volunteers, staff, and supporters for making 2024 great! I look forward to working with you all in 2025. 🌱

Dennis Fallon

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE UPDATE



Renée Bissett

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- Michelle Dungan** (Wright Service Corp.)
- Amy Fischbach** (T&D World)
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- Steven Powell** (Lewis Services)
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- Diona Neeser**, *Program & Operations Manager* (UAA)
- Renée Phillips**, *Member Services Manager* (UAA)
- Sam Wilson**, *Partnership Coordinator* (UAA)
- Nadia Geagea Pupa**, *Editor in Chief* (Pique Publishing)
- Lindsay Denney**, *Editorial Assistant* (Pique Publishing)



2025 PREVIEW: UAN's Editorial Themes and Insights

By Renée Bissett, Director of Marketing and Communications, ACRT Services, and UAA Editorial Committee Chair

As we step into 2025, the UAA Editorial Committee is eager to continue our commitment to delivering top-notch content through the *Utility Arborist Newsline* (UAN). Our mission remains steadfast: to advance excellence, innovation, and improvement in utility vegetation management by promoting professional development, outreach, research, and best practices.

This year, we are thrilled to introduce a new editorial calendar that reflects the dynamic nature of our industry and the evolving interests of our members. Each issue of the UAN will tackle themes that are both timely and relevant. Our themes for 2025 are:

- **JAN/FEB: Community Engagement and Outreach**—Highlighting the importance of connecting with and contributing to the communities we serve.
- **MAR/APR: Environmental Stewardship**—Focusing on 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: Technology and Innovation**—Showcasing the latest advancements and technological solutions in our field.
- **SEP/OCT: Sustainability and Environmental Conservation**—Addressing strategies for sustainable practices and conservation efforts.
- **NOV/DEC: Workforce Development and Education**—Emphasizing the importance of nurturing and developing talent within our industry.

Our editorial team continues to work diligently to ensure each issue of the UAN delivers valuable insights and compelling stories. As always, we are on the lookout for fresh perspectives and contributions from new voices within our community. 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 to all 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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OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

Rooted in Community: An Inside Look at the Urban and Community Forestry Society

By the UAA Outreach Committee

Founded in 1964, the Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS) has a long history of supporting people who manage urban forests across the world. Serving more than 2,000 members, the UCFS aims to promote sound and professional management of community forests in addition to creating networking and educational opportunities for their members.

The Outreach Committee interviewed Leslie Berckes, executive director for the UCFS, to learn more about the organization and their longstanding relationship with the UAA.

Q1: What is your organization, where are you located, and why do you exist?

Our organization is the Urban and Community Forestry Society. Our mission is to build the confidence, competence, and camaraderie of all professionals who manage trees and forests to create and sustain more livable communities. Our society has been around since 1964, with a long, proud history of helping guide and support the people who manage trees and urban forests each day and promote the professionalization of urban forestry.

One of the main objectives from our founding constitution still, to this day, provides a wonderful summary of why we exist: “The purpose of this

Society shall be to represent to the public, to public officials, and to other professionals within horticulture the manifold benefits that accrue to people, cities, and countries when municipal arboriculture is conducted on a scientific plane and as a major ingredient of city planning.”

Just as the founders of the organization knew that municipal arboriculture had evolved to a point of needing a dedicated professional society, we too look at the moment of time we occupy and see an inflection point. A changing climate and rapidly urbanizing communities urgently demand our attention—all while residents, businesses, and governments open their senses to the value of trees, looking for more green initiatives, and in some cases, providing historic funding for tree efforts.

With this in mind, about a year ago we underwent a name change, from the Society of Municipal Arborists (SMA) to the Urban and Community Forestry Society. As the profession has matured and grown, we acknowledged that the name of our organization was too limiting and needed to be more inclusive of the many people who make a daily tree planting or care decision. This organization has members who work for county, state, provincial, and national government; for nonprofits; and for corporate entities for whom the term “municipal” does not apply.

While our name and look changed, our mission did not. We continue to provide the membership home for urban forestry professionals and strive to more strongly support the profession of urban forestry through advocacy, analysis of best practices, promoting the latest science, focusing on workforce and professional development, getting members a seat at the table, and more. Just as UAA members understand, that’s the power of association: like-minded people pulling together to amplify their purpose.

Q2: Do you have a strategic plan? What key things are you trying to accomplish in that plan?

In early 2023, after welcoming me as the new executive director,, the UCFS Board of Directors gathered for our yearly Board retreat. During this time, we underwent a strategic planning process with Kevin Martlage of Nextier Advisors. The results of that strategic plan hearken back to our mission and focus on *confidence, competence, camaraderie*, with an additional focus on *capacity*. While strategic plans can end up on the shelf, that is not the case at the UCFS. The Board of Directors and staff take seriously each element in the plan and use it as a guiding road map for moving forward.

Throughout the early stages of implementing the strategic plan,

Continued on page 12.

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A Century of Curiosity and Service: Dr. William Richard Byrnes' Enduring Legacy

On September 29, 2024, the world bid farewell to **Dr. William Richard Byrnes**, a man whose life was defined by a passion for forestry, a dedication to education, and a deep love for his family. William spent a century embodying curiosity, service, and leadership that left a profound mark on those who knew him.

William was born on October 12, 1924, in the small town of Barnesboro, Pennsylvania. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as an aviation machinist, specializing in aircraft hydraulic systems with the Carrier Aircraft Service Unit 21 (CASU 21), headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia. He received his bachelor's degree in forest management at Penn State University in 1950, his master's degree in forestry in 1951, and a PhD in soil science in 1962.

After his time in the Navy, he transitioned into academia, where his academic journey laid the foundation for what would become an illustrious career. William was Associate Professor of Forestry and Director of Research in the School of Forest Resources at Penn State University. He eventually joined the faculty at Purdue University from 1962–1975. He became Head Director of Research from 1975–1985, then the head of the department from 1985 until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1989.

Dr. Byrnes taught courses in forest soil and water management, forest

typology, restoration of disturbed land, forest research methods, and graduate seminars. He served as Major Professor for 26 master's and doctoral students at Penn State and Purdue. He published 90 scientific papers in soil science, forest ecology, hydrology, weed science, and land reclamation.

His research was groundbreaking, earning him numerous accolades and the respect of colleagues worldwide. William was a member of professional organizations such as the Society of American Foresters, Agronomy Society of America, Soil Science Society of America, Weed Science Society, National Walnut Council, Utility Arborist Association, and Council for Agricultural Science and Technology. He was recognized in several honorary and scholastic societies, including Sigma Xi, Sigma Pi, Gamma Sigma Delta, Who's Who in America, American Men and Women of Science, and Who's Who in Frontier Science and Technology. He was also named a Fellow in the Society of American Foresters, a distinction given to those who have made exceptional contributions to the field.

After retiring, William continued his contributions to the scientific community as a consultant, most notably serving on the Board of Governors of Environmental Consultants, Inc., in Southampton, Pennsylvania, for 10 years. In 1995, William received a Distinguished Service Award from the Pennsylvania

Electric Association for his innovative research on vegetation management systems on utility rights-of-way. In 1997, he received the Education Award from the UAA. In 2003, he and his colleague Dr. William C. Bramble were recipients of the L.C. Chadwick Award for arboriculture research from the International Society of Arboriculture.

William married E. Jane Thomas on September 10, 1947, who passed away on April 6, 2016. He was a member of the Church of the Blessed Sacrament in West Lafayette, Indiana, where he served as a member of the church council and sang in the choir for 35 years. He attended Santa Catalina Catholic Church in Oro Valley, Arizona, during winter months since his retirement. William is survived by two of his daughters, Jeannette and Ellen (his death preceded by his daughter, Alice Susan); two sons, Michael and Robert; six grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Byrnes for his exceptional contributions to our industry and his pioneering research. His innovative work has had a lasting impact, advancing both the science and the practice of utility vegetation management. William's legacy of dedication, intellect, and service will continue to inspire future generations—having truly left the world a better, greener place. †



the UCFS focused on building a strong foundation and ensuring that mission-critical elements were in place or updated. In one year, we have done a lot to be really proud of. This list encompasses just a few of the strategic action goals that have been completed:

- Review and update committee structure
- Implement revised and renewed board member training and onboarding process
- Develop a formal marketing plan to elevate the organization's profile
- Grow and develop partnership with organizations like the UAA, APWA, NASF, and others
- Work with key partners on the enhancement of industry credentials
- Implement the Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) Focus Year plan

Now, as we're well into the second year of the strategic plan, the organization continues its action plans. With several steps complete, this opens the door for realignment and reassessment. The entire UCFS team is laser focused on growing and retaining membership, determining leadership training needs, developing an organization advocacy plan, a staffing-needs review, sponsorships, and a database update. These items range from very high level, big picture to specific operational steps. Throughout it all, we hold an optimistic and visionary mindset where we explore new possibilities and embrace forward-thinking approaches to urban and community forestry.

Q3: Do you have ideas about ways that the UAA could benefit your organization or opportunities for collaboration?

The UAA and UCFS have had a long history of collaboration, and with two new(er) executive directors at the helm and supportive boards, the

opportunities for collaboration are strong. Already, Dennis Fallon and I meet every other month to discuss ways to partner. These strategic planning sessions led to our first joint webinar held in July 2024 entitled "Implementing Safety Differently for City Foresters Overseeing Tree and Vegetation Management Crews." The webinar was instructed by Tim Walsh, vice president of safety and training for The Townsend Company, LLC, and former UAA Board president.

Taking lessons learned in the utility forestry/vegetation management space and sharing with UCFS urban forester members was extremely valuable. Safety is a top priority for us all, but urban foresters may not be the ones making daily safety decisions. They do, however, supervise tree crews and contractors where safety is paramount. Leaning into the knowledge honed in the utility space and sharing with urban foresters is just one example of this collaboration.

Additionally, both the UAA and UCFS are proud professional affiliates of the International Society of Arboriculture. Professional affiliate means that each organization specializes and supports a specific area of the arboriculture profession. As two of the few professional affiliates of the ISA, the UAA and UCFS jointly support each other and represent a significant portion of members who also align with the ISA. Membership associations have many goals, but one big one is to ensure that members' collective voices are heard and that they get a seat at the table.

Just imagine the power when the UAA and UCFS join their members' voices together. There is tremendous opportunity for us to work on joint issues that we identify together; with thousands of members behind us, we can make a real impact on the health, well-being, and the safety of trees and the people who depend on them.

Q4: How can the utility and urban forestry industries work together to benefit urban forests while reducing tree and utility infrastructure conflicts?

Dennis Fallon, the UAA executive director, is such a strong advocate for the members of the UAA. In conversations with him, our organization has heard the mantra: "The utility forest is in the urban forest and the urban forest is in the utility forest"—perhaps there is a Venn diagram within that statement! The underlining message is that each of us plays a part in maintaining and caring for trees in our human-populated areas—in towns big and small. It is wonderful that the utility forester and urban forester take their jobs seriously and hold the line on the things that are important to their work. However, we all know that this can lead to real or perceived conflict with safety and tree-line clearance seemingly pitted against a lush urban tree canopy.

If we each see ourselves as a piece of a puzzle that must fit together to create a whole, we would get much further in the conversation. The utility forester is right and correct in representing issues related to infrastructure conflict, just as the urban forester is right and correct in representing issues related to where, when, how, and why trees in the urban forest are cared for.

By coming to the table with an air of mutual professional respect and understanding—that at the core we all want a healthy, green community—these perceived and real conflicts can start to be addressed. The UCFS and UAA have long been proponents of a "forester exchange" of sorts where communities' urban and utility foresters spend a day or two together understanding the issues that each is dealing with. This seems like a great start for finding where conflicts are, and working together to address them. †



UAA Research Committee's Technology Transfer Sub-Committee Update

By Anand Persad (PhD), Director of Research, Science, and Innovation, ACRT Services, and UAA Research Committee Chair

The Technology Transfer Sub-Committee (TTSC) of the UAA Research Committee was formed two years ago to gauge and categorize the high volume of technology products becoming available for the industry. The Technology Transfer Sub-Committee focuses on pragmatic technology—that solves an existing problem or fills a gap, is scalable, and adaptable.

In addition to prioritizing emergent technology, the sub-committee identifies bodies of work that can be useful to the general membership, then seeks out published material and condenses it into a simplified format for easier consumption and understanding. Some of the more current works are forwarded to the *Utility Arborist Newslines* writers' group within the Research Committee and are reviewed and formatted for the *Newslines* publication. For example, the use of light detection and ranging, satellites, digitalization of rights-of-way, to name a few, rely on machine learning and algorithms that, with the help of artificial intelligence, should improve efficiency and accuracy as we address the nuances of today's utility vegetation management and integrated vegetation management landscapes. This can only happen if the models evolve with data improvement.

The TTSC looks closely at peer-reviewed and other sources to help our membership better engage in innovation in our space—which, these days, seems to be in continuous supply and ever-increasing. 🌱

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Arthur Brothers: Growing Together in UVM

Eugene (Geno) and Matthew Arthur are more than just brothers; they are colleagues at ACRT, where both have carved out successful careers in the utility vegetation management industry.



Geno and Matthew Arthur

Geno pursued a degree in natural resource conservation and an associate degree in environmental and wildlife management at SUNY

Morrisville. His rapid advancement influenced Matthew's educational and career choices. Initially studying journalism and criminal justice, Matthew shifted to environmental science at SUNY Brockport, specializing in biology and ecology.

Geno joined ACRT straight out of college and quickly advanced to operations manager, overseeing onboarding, project management, and field training across multiple states. His willingness to travel and take on diverse projects contributed to his professional growth.

Matthew's path complemented Geno's. Transitioning to environmental science, Matthew became a rights-of-way field biologist, conducting biodiversity assessments and pollinator scorecards. His extensive fieldwork skills were honed through hands-on experience and work in forestry and storm response.

Matthew initially faced challenges transitioning from broad biology to specialized plant identification, but overcame them through immersive fieldwork. Geno embraced diverse projects and travel opportunities early in his career, gaining a wide range of experiences and advancing quickly.

The Arthur brothers share a unique bond strengthened by their professional roles. Recreational activities like skiing and mountain biking allow them to spend time together and discuss work, sharing insights and learning from each other. Geno emphasizes the importance of being a sponge—willing to learn and adapt quickly. Matthew advises embracing discomfort, believing that stepping out of one's comfort zone is essential for growth. The Arthur brothers' journey from outdoor enthusiasts to successful ACRT professionals shows the impact of inspiration, hard work, and mutual support.

Learn more about our employee-owners like Geno and Matthew at acrt.com. 🌱

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WOMEN IN VM



Taylor Draisey

TAYLOR DRAISEY
Learn by Trying: A Female Perspective from the Field

By Taylor Draisey, Climber, Wright Tree Service

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a veterinarian because I had a love for the outdoors and all animals. As I grew older, I realized my love for physically demanding work and challenging myself to work just as hard or harder than the men around me. I thought maybe I would be a lineman like some of my friends and family members. I called the union hall, and someone there told me about line clearance. About one week later, I found myself joining a Wright Tree Service crew as a groundworker.

Even though I knew to expect a male-dominated work environment, I was still a bit intimidated at first. I knew I was going to have to give it my all to show I could handle the job. The guys on my crew were welcoming and kind, and I realized that being a woman in line clearance wasn't just new for me, it was also new for them—they had never had a woman in the field working alongside them. My male co-workers and leaders have pushed me and encouraged me to learn more with each role and task I take on. Since that first day, I have continued growing my career outdoors—in my hard hat, safety glasses, ear plugs, gloves, and chaps.

Every job requires some sort of adjustment period and learning curve, no matter who the co-workers are or what the work is. Currently, I work on a mechanical crew, which is

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something I had never considered before. This opportunity has been exciting for me. I enjoy operating our machines, and I take every chance to learn something new about them. The work we do with the machines was uneasy and nerve-racking at first, but I have become more comfortable over time.

I am in the field every day, but many aspects of my job are just like any other. Along with the work tasks we complete for our customers, we have other responsibilities, like routine maintenance and transportation. Maintenance is one of the keys to success in the field. A full fuel tank, a properly greased machine, and clean air filters keep things running smoothly no matter what task is on our plan for the day. The routine upkeep improves efficiency, reliability, and safety. These additional duties also remind me to slow down and pay attention. In turn, I strengthen my skills and build a sense of pride in my work.

It can be overwhelming at first to work in a male-dominated career field, but this line of work is a great fit for me. I have found that the right co-workers can make all the difference, and I am so thankful to those who have been willing to teach me along the way. I have fun learning things that most people will never get the chance to try. It takes courage each day, but it is well worth it to learn new skills and forge a career for myself. I hope other women will take the shot and try a new job or career in utility vegetation management. It may be easier than they think to join this industry and have a positive experience. †

Powering Progress: “Women in VM” Will Continue to Showcase Diversity in 2025

By Sara Dreiser, Senior Program Manager, ComEd Vegetation Management

This year, the *Newsline* launched a “Women in Vegetation Management” feature column. I was honored to be one of the diverse women featured in the inaugural year. The UAA is committed to attracting more diversity to our industry. It is not only the right thing to do, but the business savvy one as well.

Women will be instrumental to the future of this industry. They will help to drive innovation; they will be needed to address concerns over worker shortages; and they will continue to move our industry into the future as leaders.

This column has been a great success, providing visibility for female accomplishments, ensuring that women are seeing themselves represented in every issue, and providing an opportunity to get to know each other just a little better. The UAA and the *Newsline* look forward to continuing this column into 2025 as part of our commitment to continue attracting, retaining, and promoting women throughout our industry. †

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SAFETY TOOLS

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By David Hawley, Chair, UAA Safety Committee

Hello, UAA Members! My name is David Hawley, and I am honored to introduce myself as the new Chair of the UAA Safety Committee. I have been involved in safety in the line clearance industry for more than 28 years. I am currently the manager of vegetation services for Florida Power and Light. I have a tremendous passion for Safety Differently and New View Safety.

This past year has been one of challenges, growth, and significant progress for the UAA Safety Committee. I would, however, be remiss if I did not share that we are deeply saddened by the passing of our dearly loved colleague and former Chair of the UAA Safety Committee Mark Kimbrough. His contributions to this committee and to the safety culture of this industry can never be overstated. He will truly be missed. As I take on this challenge, I hope to keep Mark's spirit of building a strong safety culture and supporting the growth of safety in this industry alive.

With that said, let me take you through a recap of our key initiatives and achievements in 2024.

Navigating the Realm of Radio Frequency Safety

One of the primary challenges we faced this year 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 evaluating the best way to present our findings, possibly as an article or a white paper, to provide comprehensive guidance on this issue. We hope this work will pay off as we work to produce a safety notification on some best practices associated with working around RF for the industry.

Communication Tools and 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 truly excited about this work and look forward to the committee's investments in this area.

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 daily safety routines. 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, 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

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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 developing best practices and leveraging 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 2024 and provided updates to our members. Additionally, we engaged in the ANSI 92.0 aerial lift updates and played 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!

Addressing Violence in the Field and Focus on the Hazards

The recent 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 very meaningful and important work.

Safety Tools for the *Newsline* and Communication Initiatives

Our Safety Tools initiative for the *Newsline* will continue into 2025, covering topics such as workforce retention, DEI, 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 2025, I am 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 let's continue to advance our shared mission for a safer work environment.

Stay safe and engaged. 🌳

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2024 Tour des Trees Kick-Off Bike Ride in Stamford

By Jonathan Cain, Communications and Engagement Manager, TREE Fund

All photos courtesy of TREE Fund

The annual Tour des Trees bike ride, benefiting the Tree Research and Education Endowment Fund (TREE Fund), kicked off September 23 in downtown Stamford, Connecticut, following an evening gathering at the Bartlett Arboretum and Gardens. This five-day, 430-mile journey took participants through Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, culminating in Providence. Along the route, riders engaged with local communities to raise awareness about the importance of trees and tree research. This year's ride attracted 84 riders from all over the United States, plus Canada and the United Kingdom.

In addition to supporting TREE Fund's mission of promoting tree science, this year's event helped mark the 100th anniversary of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). As part of the celebration, a commemorative tree was planted at the Bartlett Arboretum and Gardens, where the ISA was founded.

As the communication and engagement manager for TREE Fund, I was excited to work with the Bartlett Arboretum and the ISA this year to help celebrate ISA's 100th anniversary. When the opportunity to celebrate where the ISA started arose, we at TREE Fund knew we had to bring the Tour des Trees to New England. The route was beautiful and the groups met along the way were excited to see us.

Before departing on September 23, riders stopped in St. John's Park in downtown Stamford to plant another tree in memory of one of our long-time riders.

The Tour has been going on for more than 30 years and we have had some memorable characters ride with us during that time. The ability to plant a tree in their memory when we are able to is something we are always grateful for, and we appreciate the help of the City of Stamford to make this happen.

Other outreach events during the week included children's

presentations at various schools throughout the route, educational events for the public, and more tree plantings, including a final planting in Providence to end the ride. More information on this event and future events can be found on the TREE Fund's website at www.treefund.org.

TREE Fund is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support scientific discovery and dissemination of new knowledge in the fields of arboriculture and urban forestry. The Tour des Trees bike ride is the main fundraising and community outreach event for our organization. There were 84 riders registered for this year's ride, traveling from all over the country and abroad. We hope you join us for future events! 🌳



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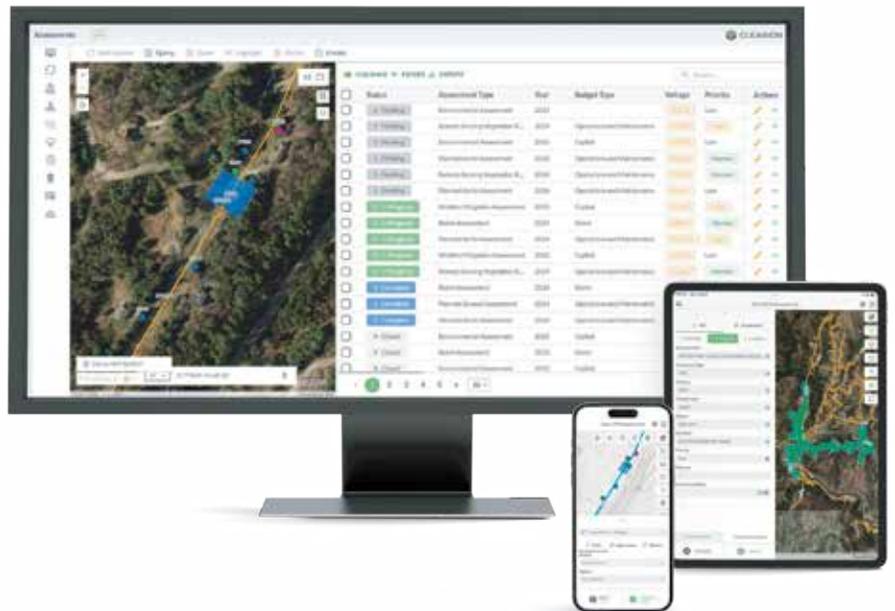
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2024 UAA Awards



The annual UAA Awards recognizes 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 award recipients have stood out as leaders and passionate promoters of vegetation management best practices, guiding the industry and the UAA to continued success. These awards signify official UAA Member recognition of how their influence has advanced the UAA mission, vision, and values.

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2024 Will Nutter Silver Shield Award winners: Isaac Winkelman (left) and Liz Westberg (right), with UAA Executive Director Dennis Fallon (middle).

★ Will Nutter Silver Shield Award

In 2021, the Silver Shield Award was renamed to memorialize the contributions made by Will Nutter, a passionate advocate of safe practices. An individual must demonstrate a significant amount of dedication to advancing safety as top of mind in every action of every job to receive this award. The UAA awards the Will Nutter Silver Shield Award to two recipients. The 2024 recipients of the award are

Liz Westberg (Growth Solutions) and **Isaac Winkelman** (Central Applicators).

Liz Westberg is renowned for her exceptional communication skills and engaging presentation style. Having delivered numerous presentations on safety across the U.S., she is a sought-after speaker known for her ability to captivate audiences and facilitate challenging conversations with ease.

What truly sets Westberg apart is her ability to lead by example. She actively seeks out opportunities to enhance safety procedures and solutions in operations and share her feedback with others. Her leadership has transformed her company's safety culture, doubling the number of safety training topics and ensuring continuous improvement in safety.

Additionally, Westberg has shared her expertise with non-utility arborists,

emphasizing the importance of safety in our profession. Through her efforts, she has become a trusted leader, influencing and promoting a safety culture at every turn.

Isaac Winkelman started his career in the industry while he was still going to school for GIS/arboriculture at Itasca Community College. He worked in the industry while going to college and found his passion for the work. He has been in the industry for 23 years and has been a forerunner for the safety aspect of the work, and he has sat on boards as well as the Safety Committee that Will Nutter was a part of. Winkelman looked up to Will Nutter and spoke very highly of how much Will cared about the industry and about safety—and we see a lot of the same qualities in him.

★ Rising Star Award

The 2024 Rising Star Award was given to **Sara Dreiser** (ComEd). Her career began at the Morton Arboretum as a research assistant, working on projects including the study of tree biomechanics, urban growth of tree roots, and creating soil management plans. In 2011, Dreiser entered the utility vegetation management field as a field planner for the Davey Resource Group. Over the next 10 years, Dreiser worked in a variety of roles, ending her time at Davey as the account manager for the Upper



2024 Rising Star Award recipient:
Sara Dreiser (right).



2024 Education Award recipient:
Lawrence Kahn (left).



2024 Utility Arborist Award recipient:
Eric Brown (right).

Midwest. Dreiser oversaw many projects with both small cooperatives and large investor-owned utilities. She transitioned to her current role with ComEd as a senior program manager. She has been involved with the UAA since 2018 as a member of the Women in Vegetation Planning Committee and as a conference speaker in 2019.

She embodies the essence of a rising star within UVM. She has displayed exceptional leadership skills and a deep understanding of UAA strategies and goals for the future of our industry. Her extensive experience has already equipped her with invaluable insights and a proven track record of successfully overseeing numerous projects across various utilities. Her active involvement in industry organizations like the UAA and the Illinois Arborist Association, coupled with her role as a conference speaker and committee member, highlights her dedication to advancing the field and empowering women in UVM.

★ Education Award

Lawrence Kahn, the UAA Education Award winner, has been instrumental in training future legal professionals to adeptly handle the complexities of the UVM industry. Because of his contributions, these individuals are well-prepared to address significant future legal, regulatory, and legislative

challenges affecting utility arborists.

Kahn is committed to promoting safe and environmentally sound UVM practices, emphasizing the importance of balancing the needs of people, infrastructure, and the environment. His advocacy for collaborative and sustainable approaches to UVM is reflected in his lectures across North America, where he enhances the professional development of utility arborists and legal professionals.

★ Utility Arborist Award

The Utility Arborist Award is presented to an individual who has made significant contributions to the field of utility arboriculture.

This year's recipient, **Eric Brown** (SMUD), epitomizes excellence and leadership in utility arboriculture. With two and a half decades of experience, his influence extends deeply within the industry, particularly through his transformative initiatives at SMUD. As the vegetation management manager, he has elevated standards and pioneered innovative practices in Electric Transmission and Distribution Vegetation Management.

His leadership roles within the UAA, including serving as president, vice president, and Western Regional representative, underscore his profound dedication to advancing the field. His

proactive involvement in industry forums like the North American Transmission Forum (NATF) and environmental stewardship initiatives further exemplifies his commitment to excellence.

Brown is currently the vegetation management manager for SMUD in grid assets responsible for the Electric Transmission and Distribution Vegetation Management program. Previously, he worked as the supervising northern program manager for Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Electric Transmission Vegetation Management Program. Brown has held several roles of increasing responsibility while at Pacific Gas and Electric for 20 years (eight as a contractor with ACRT, and 12 as a PG&E employee) on both the electric transmission and distribution side of the business.

Brown has a Bachelor of Science in natural resource management with an emphasis in forestry and range management. He is an ISA Certified Arborist and also holds a Qualified Applicators License through the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. He has been a member of the North American Transmission Forum since 2011. His extensive experience, coupled with accolades such as the Richard A. Clarke Champion Awards, and his profound impact on the industry make him a deserving recipient of the Utility Arborist Award.



★ President's Award ★

The UAA 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's recipient, put forward by 2023–2024 President Brandon Hughson, is **Bob Richens** (Arbormetrics).

Richens is an experienced professional with over 30 years of experience in the utility vegetation management industry. He has a strong background in this field, having developed and implemented a comprehensive vegetation management program as the right-of-way management supervisor at a utility. Additionally, he has also assisted other utilities in evaluating their VM programs.

Then-President Brandon Hughson, who presented the award, shared, "This year's President's Award recipient Bob Richens has been a support for me since joining the UAA Board of Directors, and has continued the last three years as I have worked through my UAA Board presidency. They are an industry colleague, a mentor, and a friend!"



2024 President's Award recipient: **Bob Richens** (left), presented by 2023-2024 UAA President **Brandon Hughson** (right).



2024 UAA Lifetime Achievement Award: **Mark Kimbrough** (right), pictured in 2019 with **Bob Richens** (left) presenting Mark the UAA Silver Shield Award.

★ Lifetime Achievement Award

The UAA Lifetime Achievement Award celebrates a person who has reached many milestones during their utility arborist career. The UAA Lifetime Achievement Award for 2024 goes to the late **Mark Kimbrough**.

Kimbrough began his career in utility arboriculture following in his father's footsteps. In his own words: "I've been in the industry all of my life. My dad was a ground person for the Townsend Corporation in 1962—the year I was born—and came up through the ranks to executive leadership in the 1970s. He retired in 1994 as executive vice president, following 38 years. Back in the 1970s, you didn't have to be 18 to work in the industry. My dad put me on a spray crew in northern Michigan and I traveled during the summers."

He was a tireless advocate for safety in our industry, rising through the ranks at The Townsend Company to vice president of safety and training. Kimbrough was always willing to help a peer with issues, regardless of what company they worked for. His knowledge coupled with his attitude and desire to see everyone in the industry go home safe was unmatched.

He was a true leader in the industry and served on multiple rule-making committees, including numerous updates to the ANSI Z133 and ANSI/SAIA A92 consensus standards. He served on numerous UAA committees, including the UAA Safety Committee. He served on the Utility Line Clearance Safety Partnership and was most recently the chair of that group. He worked with his peers to develop a line clearance tree worker endorsement for current and future Certified Utility Safety Professionals.

Kimbrough was also instrumental in working with OSHA when they modified 1910.269(r) to better fit our industry. In recognition of his contributions to safety and professionalism, he was honored with the prestigious UAA Silver Shield Safety Award in 2019. Mark passed away in April of this year. We will all miss him; however, we know that our industry will forever be impacted by his influence.

Congratulations to all of our 2024 UAA Award recipients! Your dedication and exceptional contributions have advanced our community and strengthened our industry as a whole. Through your commitment and leadership, you not only set a high standard for excellence but also inspire your peers to continue pushing boundaries and driving progress. Thank you for your tireless efforts in making our industry safer and stronger. 🌟



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Contractor Safety in Utility Vegetation Management Is Everyone's Responsibility

By Amanda Opp, Integrated Services Manager, Flathead Electric Cooperative, and UAA Board of Directors

Recently, I sat in on an interview and the question was posed to the candidate: "Who is in charge of your safety?"

The response was a quick and confident "I am!" After a split second of thought, the candidate replied, "I am my brothers' keeper and so I am in charge of my safety and everyone's safety, and really they are also in charge of my safety."

That was quite an insightful reply and was applicable to one of the topics at this year's Utility Vegetation Manager's Summit in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, hosted by Jeff Wissing and Holy Cross Energy (HCE). HCE is a not-for-profit rural electric co-op and an ideal host for our community of vegetation managers to come together and share ideas. Co-ops have seven core principles, one of which is a commitment to community. In case you haven't experienced it for yourself, co-ops are cool.

Many of the topics that we address at the UVM Summit are ongoing conversations and complex issues. We work as a group to come up with best practices for these topics and build on the ideas year after year.

There are many different types of contractors in UVM, and each is essential to the industry and part of the backbone of any successful program, not to mention the contributions that each makes to reliability and safety. A crucial question often arises: who bears the ultimate responsibility for contractor safety? Is it the utility that hires the contractors or the owner of the contract company? If any of you are like me, then you have probably had lively discussions about the topic. The System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit took a dive into this intricate issue to uncover where accountability truly lies.

We were joined by Paul Hurysz, Jr. (MBA, CSP), and Jon-Paul Paulsen. Both brought unique experiences and backgrounds to share with the group. After both speakers presented, the group came up with three takeaways.

Hurysz initiated his session by discussing with the group whether utilities could influence contractor safety. Right from the beginning, the group was



Paul Hurysz presenting about Human and Organizational Performance

challenged to think about whether one organization could influence another organization's safety. He included a slide stating "Begin with the end in mind," which challenged everyone present to define safety in their own words and then questioned whether Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR) is a valid measure of safety performance (or their own definition) based upon a recently released peer-reviewed study by Dr. Matt Hallowell et al.

Hurysz challenged the group to think about safety differently and spoke on the safety philosophy of the past (BBS or behavior-based safety), as well as what he perceives to be our philosophy of the future, Human and Organizational Performance (HOP). Hurysz concluded that organizations could influence one another by asking the right questions when prequalifying potential new contract partners, communicating and sharing collected data, leading by example and being vulnerable, and essentially developing trusted partnerships. If you are interested in

hearing more about this presentation, you can reach out to Hurysz at paul.hurysz@davey.com.

Jon-Paul Paulsen followed this with his presentation called "The Contractor's Perspective on Contractor Safety." One of the highlights of the presentation was about navigating the "arena of consequence," and he noted that extreme consequences drive utility and contractor alignment. This led to a discussion on how to align this partnership outside of extremes.

Drawing inspiration from the principles of *Extreme Ownership* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, transparency becomes paramount, encouraging contractors and utilities alike to take ownership and responsibility. In the presentation, Paulsen mentioned that to elevate the performance and safety of all contractors, it is crucial to align utility expectations with contractor deliverables. This alignment not only enhances efficiency but also significantly impacts the safety culture by fostering greater buy-in and participation. Paulsen left us with the idea "What gets measured, gets done." It was so important that he said it multiple times. If you are interested in hearing more about Paulsen's presentation, he can be reached at jpaulsen@asplundh.com.

So, what does the Occupational Safety and Health Administration have to say about it?

The Utility's Role

The utility that contracts out vegetation management services has a significant



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Trees & Lines Provides a Platform for Fresh UVM Perspectives and Ideas

“We’re engaged internationally, whether it’s with wildfire, research, or vegetation management,” Steve Martin, senior strategist at Powerlink Queensland, explained on the *Trees & Lines* podcast. “I have the privilege of being involved in quite a bit of international dialogue, both in sharing what we’re doing and learning what others are doing.”

When Martin joined the podcast, he expressed how international sharing of industry ideas and information allows us all to learn, grow, and elevate our vegetation management programs. Recent *Trees & Lines* guest Cindy Musick, senior director of vegetation management at Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, echoed that sentiment, indicating how the sharing of ideas is especially important for electric cooperatives.

“The co-op model really is set up to share information,” Musick declared. “We’re not in competition at all. We want everybody else to win. We want to do well. We want to do the right things... we share information freely.”

On *Trees & Lines*, hosts Phil Charlton (UVM veteran) and Tej Singh (Iapetus Infrastructure Services COO) provide a platform

for important industry conversations to take place and for new ideas to be shared. From LIDAR to safety to storm response, we’re covering a wide range of UVM topics on *Trees & Lines*, and we’ve had the pleasure of welcoming guests from all across the industry.

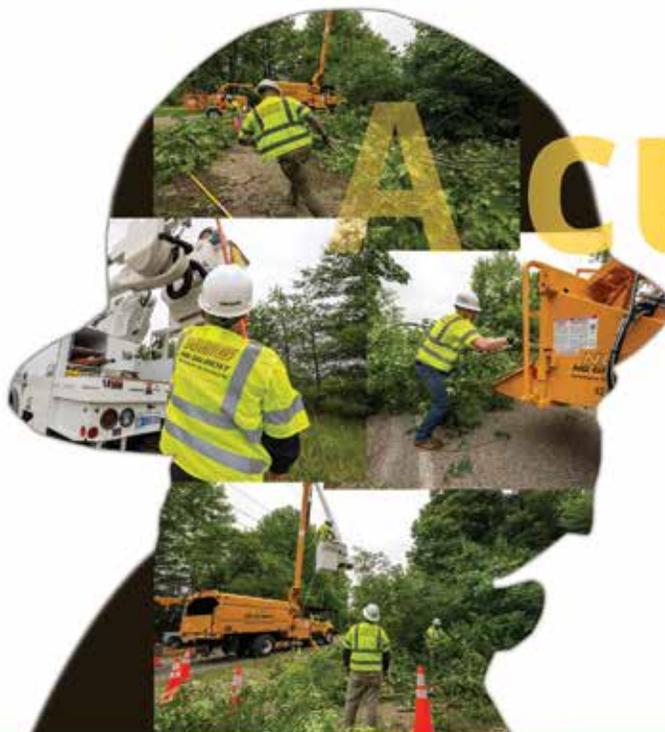
Dennis Holewinski (former UAA President), Leslie Kass (CEO of Lewis Services), Drew Seidel (VP of Distribution at SWEPCO), Kevin Eckert (President of Smart Trees Pacific), Katie Fernholz (President and CEO of Dovetail Partners, Inc.)—these are just a few of the thought leaders who have joined us over the past year. As the year draws to a close, we’re thankful for all our fantastic 2024 guests and look forward to speaking with many more experts and innovators in 2025.

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role and responsibility in ensuring contractor safety. According to OSHA, the utility is considered the "host employer" and has the following duties:

- Provide the contractor with information about the hazards and safety rules at the worksite
- Coordinate with the contractor on how to prevent and control hazards and emergencies
- Monitor the contractor's performance and compliance with safety standards and regulations
- Correct any unsafe conditions or practices that are observed or reported
- Report and investigate any accidents or incidents involving the contractor

The Contract Company's Role

The contract company, or the entity that provides the vegetation management services, also has a significant role and responsibility in ensuring contractor safety. According to OSHA, the contract company is considered the "controlling employer" and has the following duties:

- Ensure that the contractor's workers are qualified, trained, and certified to perform the work safely and competently
- Provide the contractor's workers with the appropriate personal protective

equipment, tools, and vehicles for the work

- Implement and enforce a safety program and policies that comply with OSHA and other applicable regulations and standards
- Conduct regular inspections and audits of the worksite and the contractor's workers to identify and correct any hazards or violations
- Communicate and coordinate with the utility on any safety issues or concerns
- Report and investigate any accidents or incidents involving the contractor's workers

Additionally, the contract company may be held liable for any injuries or damages caused by the contractor's workers if it is found to have breached its contractual obligations, or if it failed to provide adequate training, supervision, or equipment for the contractor's workers.

Conclusion

Contractor safety is a complex and critical issue that requires the collaboration and cooperation of both the utility and the contract company. Both parties have distinct but complementary roles and responsibilities in ensuring

that the work is performed safely and in compliance with the relevant regulations and standards. Both parties also have potential legal and financial liabilities in case of any accidents or incidents involving the contractor. Therefore, it is imperative that both parties establish clear and effective communication, coordination, and oversight mechanisms to prevent and mitigate any safety risks and hazards.

Ultimately, the entire session highlighted the need for strong relationships and collaboration as a top best practice. The team of utility vegetation managers agreed that another best practice would include inviting the contractor or utility to a structured review of safety expectations and implementing risk controls. The team highlighted transparency and vulnerability as an important characteristic of any organization's safety performance, as well as that of any safety leader.

Next year, the System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit will be hosted by Flathead Electric Cooperative and Bonneville Power in Kalispell, Montana, right near Glacier Park, May 13-15, 2025. †



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Lewis Services Welcomes New Regional Vice President Brian Ziegler

Lewis Services is pleased to announce that Brian Ziegler has joined its Operational Leadership Team and is serving as Regional Vice President for the company's Mid-Atlantic and South Carolina region. In this role, Ziegler oversees three operating divisions including the company's RESCOM business, Carolina Tree Care.

Ziegler has dedicated his entire career to vegetation management and comes to Lewis with 28+ years of experience in the sector. As an industry expert and respected practitioner, Ziegler has successfully managed teams at crew, local, district, and enterprise levels while advancing safety standards, improving processes and performance, and promoting expansion through new commercial pathways.

A lifelong learner who values education and giving back to the community, Ziegler has been involved with the Georgia Arborist Association (GAA) for the past decade and served as GAA's president from 2021-2024. During his tenure, Ziegler helped to create—and aided in leading—the Spanish Training Program

at GAA, and worked with the Greening Youth Foundation to train young adults for careers in UVM and RESCOM.

With a passion for learning, Ziegler appreciates Lewis' commitment to creating an improvement-minded culture. Ziegler shared, "Everything changes over time—but with each change comes great opportunity and the chance to continuously learn, innovate, and improve."

That commitment to continuous improvement is critical to the safety and success of Lewis' 4000+ employees across 27 states and the customers they proudly serve in blue-sky weather and storm response.

To learn more about Lewis Services and its **85-year history of Job Done Right®**, please visit www.lewisservices.com.



Brian Ziegler, Regional Vice President

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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.

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We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2023 PinE Award Recipients.

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

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Preparing for Encounters with Aggressive People

By Liz Westberg, Manager of Quality Assurance and Training, Growth Solutions, and 2024 Will Nutter Silver Shield Award Recipient

This topic was selected, and the majority of the content was created, before a pair of recent high-profile attacks against utility workers earlier this summer. This is not meant to be in response to those incidents but is part of a broader conversation on worker safety within the industry.

It's no secret to anyone in the utility industry dealing with upset customers, property owners, and other members of the general public is part of the job. This has always been the case and is no surprise given that property owners and rights-of-way managers often hold different objectives.

Incidents of hostile behavior towards utility workers that include threats or acts of violence are recorded in various ways and often go unreported in any official capacity, making overall statistics and trends difficult to track with any precision. But even without detailed data, many will no doubt agree with the sentiment that in the past few years, folks have been quicker to anger and more likely to take a hostile tone.

The industries that track such stats and have recorded spikes in threats made against workers since 2020 include retail and food service, public servants, and healthcare workers. States seem to be aware of the problem, as the majority of U.S. states have passed laws in the last 15–20 years assigning higher legal

consequences for threats or violence against utility workers and classifying them in the same category as public servants.

This article is a summary of some of the main points from training on how to respond to different situations with aggressive homeowners. It was originally put together for tree growth regulator and herbicide applicators back in 2019 at their request. As lone workers who are often the first utility contractors on a site after the pruning has been completed, they are often the first to hear from the property occupants, who may be upset with how the tree work was done.

First, a disclaimer: the following information is based on field experience, a review of available literature on the subject, and in consultation with law enforcement professionals. However, a person could do everything "correctly" when responding to a hostile or aggressive individual, but there's no guarantee that things will go alright. However, with appropriate preparation, situational awareness, and an emphasis

on de-escalation, we increase our chances of safely avoiding or leaving these situations.

Perhaps an obvious place to start this conversation is with policies and training. The utility industry strongly focuses on safety and training—and rightly so—especially when it comes to the safe operation of equipment and on jobsites. However, there are huge variances in policies and procedures between different utilities and contractors related to encounters with aggressive or hostile people.

Most companies have a safety stand-down or work-stop policy in place that allows for any worker to halt work on a site if they see an unsafe situation unfold. These internal policies need to be worded in such a way as to extend that right to a worker to leave a jobsite or seek refuge when an unsafe situation with the environment unfolds, which might also include things like aggressive dogs or swarming insects in addition to people. Crucially, our frontline workers must genuinely be and feel safe from

Introducing the Next Generation at Grow With Trees

Our Grow With Trees team has been experiencing remarkable growth in recent years. This success stems from our unwavering commitment to providing top-tier vegetation management consulting services and expertise to a diverse range of clients in the energy sector.

In the past two years, we've strategically expanded our team to meet the increasing demand for our specialized services. We've welcomed several new professionals, including training and communications specialists, motion graphic designers, geospatial scientists, and natural resources and sustainability experts. These talented individuals bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to our company, enhancing our ability to deliver innovative solutions and exceptional service to our clients.

Amidst all this exciting development, we've also experienced a heartwarming coincidence. Three of our team members have recently welcomed new additions to their families. We're proud to celebrate these joyous occasions and recognize the importance of work-life balance in all that we do.

Branching Out and Blossoming

Grow With Trees has also expanded our service offerings, including branching into the solar energy industry. This move aligns with our commitment to sustainability and our vision for a greener future. Our expertise in vegetation management planning and training is essential for ensuring optimal performance and longevity of solar facilities.

As we continue to grow and evolve, we've built a robust

framework to support our scaling efforts. This includes investing in cutting-edge technology, streamlining processes, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. These efforts enable us to efficiently serve a growing number of clients across a broad geography and span of industries, including electric utilities, solar facilities, natural gas and petroleum pipelines, railways, and departments of transportation.

Planting Seeds for the Future

As a company deeply rooted in the principles of sustainability and environmental stewardship, we believe in the wisdom of the Greek proverb: "A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit." Our work in integrated vegetation management is a testament to this philosophy. We're not just managing vegetation today; we're planning for the health and resilience of our ecosystems for generations to come. IVM's focus on long-term sustainability, biodiversity, and the use of environmentally sound practices aligns perfectly with our vision of a future where both humans and nature thrive.

Grow With Trees is a company that is truly flourishing. Our commitment to excellence, innovation, and sustainability has positioned us as a leader in the vegetation management industry. As we continue to expand our services and team, we remain dedicated to providing our clients with the highest level of expertise and support. We're not just growing our business; we're also nurturing a thriving community of professionals and their families and planting the seeds for a better tomorrow. †



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admonishment for doing so.

The second thing these policies should require is a procedure for recording and reporting interactions that contain threats or other aggressive behaviors. Cooperation between utilities and contractors can work to share information about known upset customers so the next worker who goes back to that property is prepared. Often when utility workers are yelled at or threatened it goes unreported, under the assumption that it was just bluster. But unfortunately in at least one case, it's not going to be just words, and we increasingly cannot let the warning signs slide.

In addition to having policies that empower employees to trust their gut and requiring such incidents to be reported, companies that operate in the utility industry should include conversations about managing interactions with aggressive individuals in their training programs. We need a particular emphasis on methods to de-escalate encounters before they become unmanageable. The following is a summary of some of the main points discussed in our training on this subject.

What is meant by a "hostile" or "aggressive" person? We need to recognize that it could be anyone—the property or homeowner, a tenant, a neighbor, or any other member of the public who makes us concerned for our physical safety or engages in harassing behavior. Workers are often so focused on the occupants of the property that they may not be aware of who else is around, and it is often a neighbor or someone else who ends up starting the confrontation. Numerous types of encounters or situations can be discussed and prepared for. A non-exhaustive list might include people who

make threats against utility workers; use physical intimidation; use biased or verbally abusive language; exhibit stalking behavior; prevent a worker from leaving the property; carry or brandish weapons or hold someone at gunpoint; and most seriously, assault or attempt to cause harm.

In most of these situations, the same basic steps can be followed:

1. **Assess the situation**
2. **Attempt to de-escalate**
3. **Leave**
4. **Document and report**

Assessing the situation: this is a process that should start with the safety brief each day and upon arriving at each jobsite. It is basic situational awareness for safety concerns, with an eye out for more human elements. Questions a worker might ask themselves as they arrive on a property:



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- How close are the neighbors?
- What kind of property is this (e.g., single home, agricultural)?
- Does it look like someone is home?
- Are there signs of a dog on the property?
- Are there over-the-top "No Trespassing" signs?
- Is there space to turn the work vehicle around for a quick exit if necessary?
- Is there cell phone reception here?

It may seem a little paranoid, but every bit of information a person can already have sorted out in their brain helps to save important fractions of a second if they need to respond to an escalating situation.

Assessing what's happening needs to continue throughout the conversation with the property occupant. Pay attention to their tone, their body posture, and their

behavior or attitude while keeping an eye on what's happening in the surrounding area. It can be a lot to keep straight while remaining engaged in the conversation and it takes mindful practice. Role-playing some of the more common situations in training is a good way to prepare a team for these interactions.

De-escalation is another skill that can be prepared for ahead of time. We all have a fight-or-flight response when situations start to get heated. Staying focused on remaining calm and bringing down the intensity of a conversation can be difficult to do. Train on keeping these strategies in mind—and don't take it personally. Often, folks will try to hold a field worker responsible for how they feel they've been wronged. At this point, whoever is there is just the messenger and needs to remember that there's no need to argue or be defensive. Hear them out and keep assessing the situation to gauge if they're capable of being reasoned with.

To that end, workers may need to reset their objectives. When going to these properties, usually we are there to notify of planned work, get permissions for tree removals, or perform the tree work. Our objectives are generally not the same as the property occupants. If they are angry or hostile, the new objective needs to be de-escalation—not to keep trying to stick to a message that isn't getting traction. Start by actively listening to what they are saying and validating their concerns. Note that validating concerns does not mean agreeing with them. It might sound something like, "You must be frustrated," "You must care about this tree," or "I can see you're upset with how the communication has been about this." Not admitting fault or saying they're right but letting them know you've heard what they are saying. Someone who is skilled at these conversations and assessing the



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situation will notice a change in tone or body language when the homeowner has calmed down to a more reasonable state of mind.

Other conversational tools that can be used include working their interests or objectives into the work plan, if known. Highlighting mutual benefits to the work being done. In the case of removals, it may be that with the tree gone, there will be fewer disturbances. In the case of herbicides, it may be that new tree sprouts won't destroy their fence. For tree growth regulators, the tree will be healthier and more drought-resistant. And where possible, offer choices that are both acceptable to the utility and give some sense of agency to the property owner.

But some people will not be reasoned with. Every person must have a limit of what they will tolerate before it's time to walk away from the situation. This will look different for everyone, depending on their background and experience. Lone workers need to know they can remove themselves from a situation that is making them uncomfortable without fear of reprisal. There are other ways to

come back and deal with the work that needs to be done on that site. Someone sticking around and possibly making a bad situation worse is not the only option.

Finally, there are other considerations and preparations utilities and their partnering contractors can make ahead of time. Proper notification of property owners before both work planning and tree work goes a long way toward preventing misunderstanding. All crews or lone workers should attempt contact by knocking at the front door before venturing deeper into a property. Especially in rural areas, utilities should provide contact information for properties so phone calls can be made for the same purpose.

Professional appearance makes a huge difference as well. Ensuring contractors have vendor magnets or decals for work vehicles and contractor badges for the workers goes a long way towards lending credibility and preventing suspicions from turning into confrontations.

Whatever aspect of the utility vegetation management industry you work in, if you have to interact with

members of the public, it is important to understand and prepare for the reality that these interactions may become heated or even hostile and aggressive. While some of the possible outcomes we prepare for may seem unlikely, preparation can prevent us from having to instinctively respond as it's happening to us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz Westberg

is a manager of quality assurance and training at Growth Solutions and has been with the organization since 2018. She is an International Society of

Arboriculture Certified Arborist and Utility Specialist. Westberg is also ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) certified. Westberg holds a Bachelor of Science in wildlife biology and a Bachelor of Arts in fine/studio arts, both from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. †



Liz Westberg

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Honoring Our Heroes: A Decade of Dedication with Saluting Branches

By Sam Hickey, Communications Chair, Board of Directors, Saluting Branches



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Each November, our country celebrates Veterans Day—a day dedicated to honoring the men and women who have served in the U.S. military. Saluting Branches and Veterans Day share a profound, yet common, purpose: honoring and recognizing the service and sacrifice of U.S. veterans.

Each year, Saluting Branches holds a National Day of Service, where thousands of arborists, tree climbers, and other professionals volunteer their time and expertise to prune, plant, and care for trees on veteran-dedicated properties. This collective effort ensures that the landscapes surrounding these spaces remain safe, beautiful, and healthy for the veterans and their families who visit.

Our Mission

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



Saluting Branches was founded in 2015 by a group of arborists in Minnesota. The group recognizes the importance of honoring our nation's veterans. Each year, in partnership with thousands of tree care companies, volunteers, and sponsors, Saluting Branches' national Day of Service provides tree and landscape services at more than 100 veteran-dedicated properties across the United States, including national cemeteries and Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals, medical centers, clinics, and nursing homes.

Throughout the last decade, Saluting Branches has made a significant and lasting impact. Since its inception, thousands of volunteers from the tree care industry have mobilized and contributed their time and skills, to make a national difference.

Volunteer Participation: More than 3,500 tree care companies, arborists, and professionals volunteer annually.

Value of Donated Services: Over the last 10 years, Saluting Branches has provided over \$21 million worth of tree care and landscape services.

Growing Legacy: Since 2015, Saluting Branches has planted nearly 2,000 trees to honor Vietnam War POWs and MIAs who remain unaccounted for.

Recognition: The annual Day of Service hosted by Saluting Branches has become one of the top four days of service provided to VA cemeteries nationwide.

In the spirit of honoring our veterans, we extend our heartfelt thanks to VFW Post 9644 in Sheridan, Colorado, and Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver, Colorado, for their generosity in hosting our annual strategic planning session. Their support serves as a reminder of why it's so important to continually honor and celebrate our veterans.

Board Members' Personal Ties to Our Mission

Our commitment to honoring veterans is deeply personal for many of us at Saluting Branches. As veterans themselves, two of our board members bring a unique perspective to our mission.

Kelly Maes, Saluting Branches director and sponsorship co-chair and United States Marine Corps veteran, said:

"I have been working in the tree care industry for just over 12 years now. Before that, I served and am now a 20-year retired Marine veteran. I was invited to volunteer for Saluting Branches' Day of Service by one of my colleagues about eight years ago, and once I saw firsthand what Saluting Branches was and how they made an



impact in our veteran community, I knew I had to be more involved. I now serve as a Saluting Branches board member, three years running. Having family and fellow Marines who I served with laid to rest in our national cemeteries makes this event a personal one for me. It is an honor to be a part of such a gratifying experience year in and year out.”

Robert Harden, director and outreach chair and United States Marine Corps veteran, shared:

“Having served on the board of directors for two years now, I’ve learned a tremendous amount about the tree care industry. And as a 26-year Marine Corps veteran, I see the similarities as to why veterans come into the industry:

- They wake up each day with a ‘mission.’
- They have a crew of people they rely on, and in some cases, their very lives are entrusted to their ‘team.’
- They ensure codes/rules of engagement are adhered to so that even in an adrenaline rush, danger-packed mission, the team can perform its duties in the safest possible manner so that at the end of the day the mission is accomplished, and the team can make it home to their loved ones.

We all can agree that nothing quite makes up for our military service, but I’ve learned to see and understand that same feeling of comradery and brotherhood/sisterhood that is shared within the industry.”

How to Get Involved

Our dedicated volunteer committees work tirelessly throughout the year to support our mission. Our fundraising and sponsorship teams are essential in securing the funds needed to keep our website, database, and marketing efforts running smoothly. Outreach groups help us connect with more arborists, volunteers, and veteran organizations, expanding our reach. Meanwhile, our enrollment, logistics, and communications teams pull everything

together for the annual Day of Service. There’s a role for everyone, and every contribution makes a difference.

Five Ways to Support Saluting Branches

1. **Donate:** Make a direct impact by supporting our mission with a monetary donation. Every dollar counts and helps us continue our vital work in honoring our nation’s veterans.
2. **Sponsor:** Become a sponsor and unlock exclusive benefits based on your level of support. Choose from various sponsorship levels for benefits such as social media and newsletter features, and logo placement on our annual T-shirt.
3. **Donate Merchandise:** Support us by donating merchandise or services from your company. Your contribution can be used as auction items, prizes, or incentives to raise funds for Saluting Branches.
4. **Volunteer:** Encourage your employees to get involved by volunteering for our planning committees. Their skills and expertise can make a significant impact on the success of our events and initiatives.
5. **Spread the Word:** Help us raise awareness by promoting Saluting Branches within your organization and to your network. Together, we can inspire others to join our cause and make a difference.

As we look ahead, we encourage you to mark your calendars for the next Saluting Branches Day of Service on Wednesday, September 17, 2025. We’d love for you to join us in making a real difference as we work to honor and care for the spaces dedicated to our veterans. Your participation helps keep our tribute to their service meaningful and lasting. Learn more at salutingbranches.org.



Sam Hickey

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha (Sam) Hickey is a content specialist at ACRT Services, where she has been since 2020. In addition to her role at ACRT Services, she serves on the

Saluting Branches Board of Directors as the communications chair. She also sits on the UAA Editorial Committee. Hickey holds bachelor’s degrees in public relations and media production from the University of Akron and a Master of Arts in professional communication from Youngstown State University. 🌳



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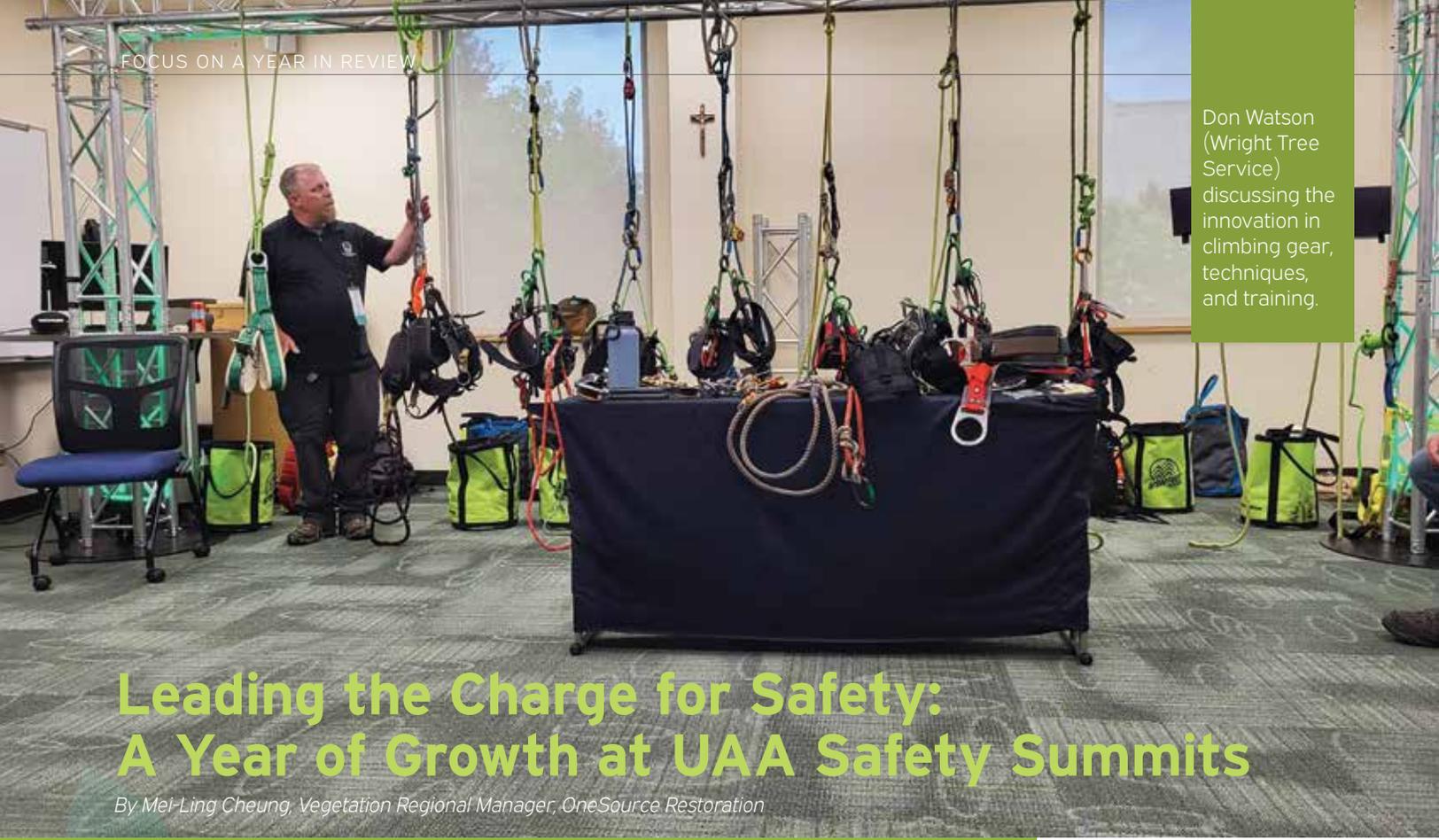
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Don Watson (Wright Tree Service) discussing the innovation in climbing gear, techniques, and training.



Leading the Charge for Safety: A Year of Growth at UAA Safety Summits

By Mel-Ling Cheung, Vegetation Regional Manager, OneSource Restoration

This year I have been blessed to work for a company that values and invests in safety and innovation. I have worked in the utility arborist industry for over 16 years and this is the first year that I have stumbled upon the UAA Safety Summits. These safety summits are unlike any other conference and safety summit that I have been to, and I must say: if you want to make a difference in the industry, then this is the place to be!

The structure of the summits provides an encouraging environment for people of all work levels to share their knowledge and learn from others' experiences in the field. Each summit had breakout sessions, where the attendees were divided into five groups. This allowed for smaller, more intimate discussion groups, and split up individuals from within the same company. Many of the discussion topics were planned by and geared toward challenges encountered by the host utility. They deliberately focused on problems that are seen in the field and were intended to be addressed by boots on the ground rather than managerial decision-makers.

The first summit of the year was hosted by Tampa Electric in Dover, Florida. Michael Smith (Townsend) struck up a conversation with me at breakfast, and then I had the pleasure of watching his live line demo. Both his PowerPoint presentation and his live presentation were captivating and a good reminder for anyone working in the field to not become complacent.

Brian Christensen and Brandon Betts (Wright Tree Service) led a discussion on bucket truck inspections, specifically locating and checking the crucial bolts on the truck and gaining a better understanding of why you should not fly the bucket when one of the crucial bolts is out of place.

"Trees Under Tension" was an outstanding topic presented by Tim Walsh (Townsend) and his surprise guest from the

audience, Josh Anderson of Redwing Rigging Solutions. They explained the current methods to address trees under tension when there are limited tie-off locations, where the weakest points of the rope are when rigging a tree under tension, and tools that are being tested for the market to decrease the weak points.

When the second summit rolled around, I was expecting a lot of overlap from its predecessor, but I was pleasantly surprised that OG+E's summit in Midwest City, Oklahoma, was very different. Hector Hernandez (First-Class Dog Training) was the keynote speaker. Hernandez's exceptional topics and delivery



First-Class Dog Training's Hector Hernandez

are absolutely memorable! He started with impactful conflict resolution training and stayed to facilitate a breakout session on preparing yourself for dog encounters and attacks, where he provided us with advice that everyone in the room wished they had known before.

Joe Zito (Asplundh Tree Experts) enlightened us on a DOT inspection discussion of what to expect, and the dos and don'ts when being inspected. Paul Hurysz (Davey Resource Group) explained how to use the Energy Wheel to facilitate discussions when performing pre-job briefings.

The next summit was hosted by FirstEnergy in Akron, Ohio. I was in a group of mostly transmission climbers who found Brian Christensen's discussion about working aloft to be useful. George Emery (FirstEnergy) led the discussion on storm response that was not just about protocol, but more about being in the right headspace. As an outsider, I had a lot to say in the flagging operations discussion with Chris Hoffman (FirstEnergy).

With three summits under my belt, I walked away feeling pumped that I was able to be a part of all the great discussions!

The last UAA Safety Summit of the year was hosted by Duke Energy, Indiana Michigan Power, and NIPSCO at the beautiful St. Mary's College Campus in Indiana. Don Watson of Wright Tree Service talked about innovation in climbing gear and techniques, and the gap in knowledge and training that has developed throughout the years.

On the second day, Liz Westberg with Growth Solutions had a very timely presentation on lone worker safety, as we came to find that several line clearance workers had firearm encounters the day before. Tim Walsh presented about where the industry is headed with respect to safety, the misleading language that we use, and what words to stop saying. At the end of the day, I overheard a man talking on the phone to his superiors about Walsh's presentation—he was spreading the word that their company needed to change.

Thank you to this year's host utilities, as these discussions would not have happened without you. I encourage more utilities to become UAA Safety Summit hosts. Utilities are a major driving force in the direction of our industry's metamorphosis, and we need strong partnerships to implement positive change. As someone who is passionate about this industry, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to discover the UAA Safety Summits. I feel like our voices are finally being heard. 🌱



Asplundh's Joe Zito

Nelson Money

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Together we raised **\$8,923.00**

Thank you to all our participants for joining the initiative aimed at supporting reforestation efforts and the future talent of our great industry!

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#TREESANDUTILITIES

Approaching Utility Data Currency at

By Claire King, Content Manager, UDC

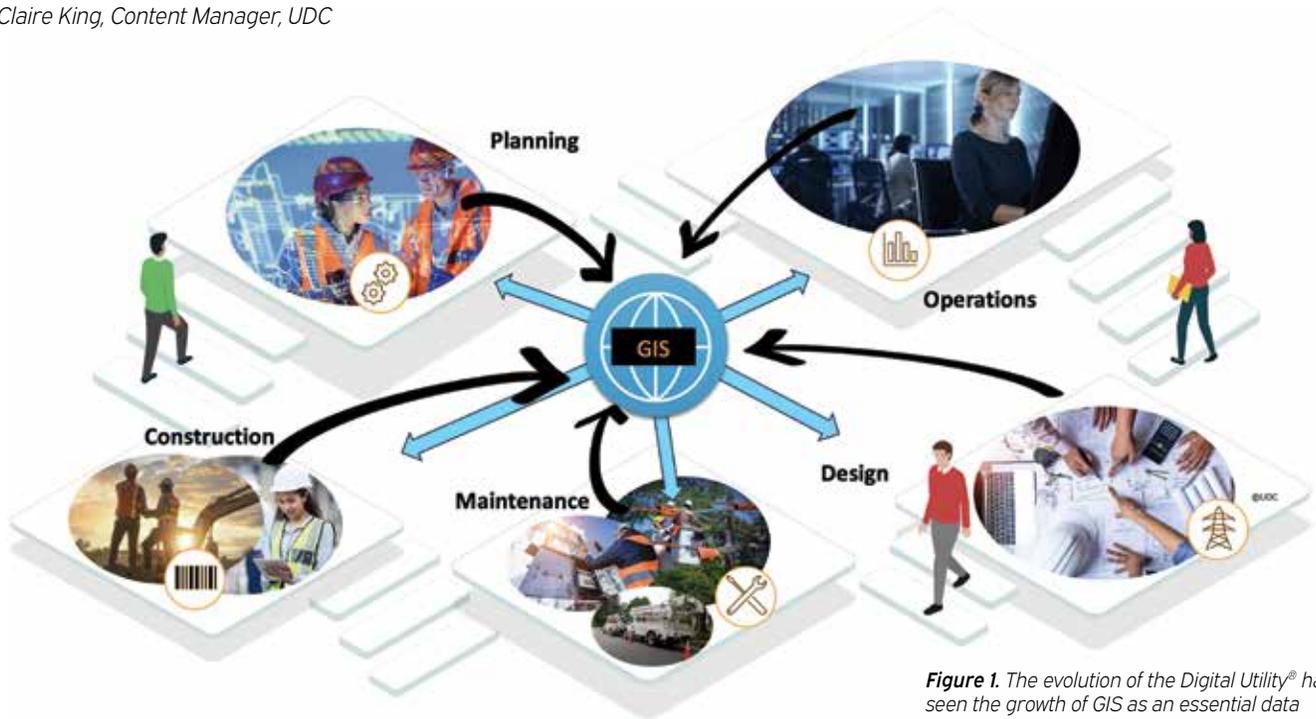


Figure 1. The evolution of the Digital Utility® has seen the growth of GIS as an essential data source, elevating the importance of data currency and data governance.



Jenny Burgess, GIS Manager, Dominion Energy Virginia



Kurt Towler, GIS Manager, Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative

During this digital transformation era, many utility companies are reaching across organizational divides to connect their business processes using GIS—Geographic Information System. Positioning GIS as a foundational enterprise system for utility operations is driving organizations to redefine how they use data. The role and currency of data have become increasingly important for powering critical, daily operations.

Dominion Energy Virginia (DEV) and Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative (SSVEC) are experiencing firsthand the benefits of using GIS as the key enterprise system for bridging their field and back-office business processes. The shift to an enterprise organizational structure has presented advantages for both utilities, but not without the growing pains of maintaining data currency during this transformational period.

In this conversation, UDC and GIS managers Jenny Burgess of DEV

and Kurt Towler of SSVEC share their journeys to Enterprise GIS and how they approach data currency against the backdrops of their digital transformations.

EVOLUTION OF THE DIGITAL UTILITY: DECONSTRUCTING SILOS

The early 2000s brought sweeping organizational changes for companies with the assimilation of GIS into the utility sector. Before the twenty-first century, most utilities operated their business workflows within organizational silos. The lack of a centralized enterprise system isolated processes and teams and hindered effective decision-making at the company level—creating differing standards, separate maps and data, multiple systems for operations, varying decision models, increased operational costs, and siloed asset databases for the businesses.

Utility businesses were initially reluctant to accept GIS and share their data. Over time, utilities realized the value, and GIS evolved into a versatile tool that provides a complete view of

Dominion Energy and Sulphur Springs

utility operations while meeting the specific needs of the business. Today, GIS is embraced as a true enterprise system for the Digital Utility®. The need for high-quality utility data increases daily and has become a focal point for utilities looking to provide first-rate customer service.

The Utility Experience

Both DEV and SSVEC are experiencing this powerful transformation as the GIS applications for managing day-to-day operations continue to grow.

“The whole company has come to appreciate GIS’s value and knows that they can reach out to us. Over time, the way data is used has become so much greater,” remarked Burgess.

When Burgess joined DEV in 2001, most utility assets were loaded into the GIS, but their associated data wasn’t fully utilized due to the newness of the spatial technology. The information in the GIS

has since become the backbone of the utility’s operations and critical related systems, and the currency and accuracy of the data have become vital as a result.

“The more we use GIS data, the more we integrate it with other things, the more key it is that it’s right,” she shared.

Towler has witnessed a similar journey since joining SSVEC in 2005. The cooperative’s initial priority was to get its maps up-to-date.

“When I started, we had maps that were ten years out of date,” Towler said. After transitioning to GIS and streamlining the work order process, SSVEC got the turnaround time of its mapping to less than two days and now operates in real-time mode.

APPROACHING UTILITY DATA CURRENCY

These revolutionary changes aren’t happening overnight. A modern-day

challenge with maintaining utility data currency stems from bridging the different business processes during this transformational change. Burgess and Towler are tackling this challenge by standardizing processes, fostering team communication, and augmenting their GIS data workforce.

Value in Following Process

Ensuring timely updates from field construction to updating the map has become a focus for the GIS departments. Both organizations are implementing unified processes to help bridge the work performed in the field and back-office.

Meeting DEV’s two-day posting goal requires a great deal of coordination and communication. Process discipline has helped Burgess and her team achieve these goals and find ways to improve the process at the same time.

“Maybe something got built in the field

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around keeping up with the increased business requests for current asset information. DEV and SSVEC have benefited significantly from investing in a trusted partner to help manage their data currency.

DEV historically maintained its data in-house. Only recently has DEV partnered with UDC to help offset the data workload. One of the most significant advantages of this partnership is that it allows Burgess' team to focus on high-value initiatives without sacrificing the daily routine work. Burgess said:

"I think most of us at some point along the way are going to be doing something different with our GIS, whether it's upgrades, work management solutions, or outage management solutions. To have a partner help you be able to dedicate your most experienced people to those projects is so valuable. We can have help as long as we need it. It's not the same as asking for employees who you might not need in five years when the project work starts to die down."

Partnering with UDC has provided Towler's team the flexibility to focus on meeting the unique needs of all its members.

"Handling everything that's happening at scale, that's an extremely difficult problem for the organization. GIS, the work with UDC, keeping the data current—all these efforts are driven towards handling things at scale but also giving us the time and energy to handle the individual member moments that are required," he said.

LOOKING AHEAD: GETTING GIS IN THE ROOM

Burgess and Towler see advanced technology implementations and automation as the next big opportunity for utilities, making current data nonnegotiable.

"If we want smart outage sensors to locate and isolate a fault, we're going to have to be even more diligent about the quality of our data and how quickly it's updated," Burgess stated.

Towler added that the new challenge is now deconstructing partner silos. "How do we bring our partners together so that we're sharing correctly in a timely way? As these systems become more complex, waiting 18 months to replace a pole is no longer an option."

When asked about the future role of enterprise data, Burgess and Towler see a growing need for digital utilities, especially in decision-making.

"I see GIS playing a huge role in that transformation itself of how we make decisions and our internal capacity to grow," Towler said. "We need to be there at the beginning of the process to help make better decisions."

Burgess added, "The businesses can reach out to us because they need to make a decision about something, and they need to compile some data in a unique way to make those decisions. That support helps the company start choosing the right things to invest in and figure out."

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

As Burgess and Towler discussed their challenges around managing data currency, they weren't surprised to hear how similar their experiences aligned.

"I'm sure you feel the same level of being spread thinly that I do," Towler joked.

Agreeing, Burgess said, "It never ceases to amaze me. We can be half a country away. We could be using a different GIS. And somehow, we're all in the same place, and it's strangely comforting."

At the end of the day, data doesn't discriminate. The challenges faced and experiences felt are the same. And that is strangely comforting.

ABOUT DOMINION ENERGY VIRGINIA

DEV supports nearly 2.8 million electric customers, managing over 60,000 miles of overhead and underground distribution lines in Virginia and northeast North Carolina.

ABOUT SULPHUR SPRINGS VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SSVEC has grown into the largest electric cooperative in Arizona, supplying power to more than 45,000 members and maintaining 4,100 miles of electrical lines in southeastern Arizona.

ABOUT UDC

UDC is a Platinum Esri Partner that offers GIS-centric system integration services to utilities and infrastructure companies. Privately owned and operated, the company is headquartered in Denver, Colorado, and has offices in Florida, Wisconsin, and India.

Readers interested in learning more are invited to listen to the accompanying UDC Conversation™ Approaching Data Currency podcast with Jenny Burgess and Kurt Towler.



Claire King

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Claire King has nine years of experience in the GIS utility industry. Her previous work with UDC focused on GIS project management and technical writing. She now leads content creation and management as well as other key marketing communications efforts for the company. †

UAA Committees in Focus: How Our Volunteers Are Navigating the Next Five Years

By Craig Kelly, Principal Program Manager–Land Management Safety & Compliance, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and UAA Editorial Committee Champion

The Utility Arborist Association is engaged and focused on its vision of being the leading organization for people who provide professional vegetation management services in a right-of-way environment. As its mission, your organization also drives excellence, innovation, and improvement in utility vegetation management through professional development, outreach, research, and the use of best practices.

How is this done? The countless committed volunteers who engage as participants on one or more of the UAA committees. The UAA would not be successful in its vision or mission if it were not for the many committees, their volunteers, and the countless hours spent by these wonderful folks.

In addition to a few ad hoc groups, the established committees include the Safety Committee, Research Committee, Professional Development Committee, Right-of-Way Symposium Committee, Environmental Stewardship Committee, Summit Committee, Outreach Committee, Finance Committee, Events Committee, and lastly, the Editorial Committee.

Each of these committees includes a diverse team of professionals who share interests in the committee's focus. Each committee has a representative from the Board of Directors known as the Committee Champion, plus most committees have both a Chair and Co-Chairperson. These teams clearly help the Board work more efficiently by dividing up the organization's goals, initiatives, and workload, allowing the Board to focus on its short- and long-range strategic plan. Committees focus on more specific topics which are derived from the strategic plans, each having specific timelines and milestones.

These committees provide a training ground for leaders to refine their skills and for future leaders to learn the skills needed to be effective practitioners in the VM space. They do this by sharing knowledge through the *Newsline* and the many events the UAA holds throughout this great country, including regional meetings, safety summits, the System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit, the Right-of-Way Symposium, and many others. Additionally, skills development and refinement come in the form of webinars for UAA members, which are offered throughout the year. So, watch your email or log on to the UAA

website to access and register for webinars or to find out what events might be happening in your region.

Each year the UAA Board of Directors and UAA staff meet following the annual System Vegetation Managers Summit and hold their strategic planning session. Earlier this year, the Board and staff met in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and during this planning session discussed and determined areas where the UAA should provide additional focus over the next five years to move the organization and members to the next level. The meeting concluded with the group establishing two specific goal buckets: education and best practices. The bucket focused on education has two main goals, which are (1) future leadership and (2) building external stakeholder partnerships. The Events Committee will be the lead committee for the future leadership goal, and the Editorial Committee will lead the second goal of building external partnerships.

A sub-goal in this bucket is for the continued success of the Certified UVM Professional Credential program offered through the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (UWSP) and the many community college programs that are currently available. Helping to establish more programs at the community college level has been, and will continue to be, a main focus of the UAA and its partners. This sub-goal or initiative will be led by the Professional Development Committee and supported by the Board of Governors of the UWSP program, and will include the other committees when input is needed.

The bucket focusing on best practices will be led by the Environmental Stewardship Committee and supported by all other committees. This goal focuses on UVM operational framework, covering conditional-based maintenance as well as recognizing ROWs as assets.

Although these are areas where the committees will spend most of their time, they will also focus on their individual "what's next" initiatives. If you want to know each committee's accomplishments and what's next, please see their individual slides on the 2024 Annual Business Meeting recording located in the member portal on the UAA website.

Lastly, if you're a member of the UAA and are interested in engaging in committee work, pick one of interest and reach out to the UAA staff and ask to be included—that's all it takes! Committees are always looking for folks who are interested in helping. Join a committee today! 🌱

UAA's Strategic Goals - 5 Year Plan



May 2024 - UAA Board continued with the development of the strategic goals to support the UAA's dynamic 5-year plan



Two principal goals were established around Education and Best Practices - each being inclusive of several components

EDUCATION – Goal 1	EDUCATION – Goal 2	BEST PRACTICES – Goal 1
Lead Committee - Events Engaged Committees - All	Lead Committee - Editorial Engaged Committees - All	Lead Committee - Environmental Stewardship Engaged Committees - All
<u>Future Leadership</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit technical professionals Increase "Circle of Friends" Access to lobbyists Assess possible addition of Secretary to the board 	<u>Building External Stakeholder Partnerships</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing Diversity of Thought (New Input) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affinity Group Collaboration Advisory Roles Growth and Thought Diversity Lobby Access How to Structure Future International Outreach 	<u>UVM Operational Framework</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conditional Based Maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review as an opportunity Recognition of ROW's as Assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment to Value Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trees on Edge Floor of ROW Fire Control and Mitigation
Lead Committee - Professional Development Engaged Org - Board of Governors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University Wisconsin Stephens Point Community Colleges and Trade Schools 		

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

A Year in Review: A Summary of Key 2024 ESC Newsline Topics

By Kim Laing, Business Development Manager, ArborMetrics

The Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC) has had an amazing year, with several interesting articles published in the *Utility Arborist Newsline* Spotlight on the Environment. These include:

- January/February—"Are We Ready for Generation Z?" by Stan Vera-Art
- March/April—"How Thinking like a Blue Jay Can Support Your ESG Strategy" by Kieran Hunt
- May/June—"Environmental Stewardship and Safety" by Anna Davis and Adrienne Jones
- July/August—"Utility Vegetation Management in a Changing Climate" by John Goodfellow
- September/October—"Environmental Law: Get Ready for a Wild Ride" by Lawrence J. Kahn

If you haven't had a chance to read these articles yet, I encourage you to download previous issues of the *Newsline* and give them a ponder—you won't be disappointed.

While all these articles vary in topics, there are major themes and ideas shared throughout them all. These themes are indicative of the major topics discussed during ESC meetings, and showcase the general sentiment of our industry. These key themes are:

- Environmental stewardship is now a part of everything we do.
- The challenges of climate change intersect with, and impact, our work.
- There's a growing demand to attract and retain a diverse and skilled workforce that will meet growing challenges.
- Our profession is shifting towards a data-driven and science-based approach to UVM, and this is changing the way we approach IVM.
- Companies are increasingly looking to emphasize positive impacts on ESG performance.

- Safety and environmental stewardship are complementary.
- Environmental stewardship requires a shift in our attitudes, choices, and education.
- Our call to action is inspired by wanting a better life for future generations.
- We are becoming more proactive about how we facilitate change on our ROWs.
- While we still have a long way to go, we should recognize the significant progress we've made so far.
- Staying informed about environmental regulatory interpretation and enforcement is crucial.
- Environmental stewardship is an increasingly important and conscious choice that requires deliberate actions.

As we reflect on 2024, there is one major theme echoed by every author: optimism for the future. Here are some key highlights and quotes from these articles that reflect this optimism, based on my interpretation.

The Future of Our Workforce Is Extremely Bright

The future generations of our workforce will have great opportunities and challenges ahead. At the same time, they are the first generation entirely shaped by the digital age. As outlined by Stan Vera-Art's "Are We Ready for Generation Z?", what's unique about Gen Z is that they are equipped with both technological skills and have a major concern for the environment, compared to generations before them. This provides ample opportunities for utilities who favor environmental stewardship to hire talent that can manage their lands.

ESG Reporting Shows Evidence of How IVM Is Creating Value

"Aligning IVM with data-driven management and Science-Based Target initiatives (SBTi) will be persuasive to organizations steeped in cultural shifts tied to carbon offsets and ethical land management," wrote Kieran Hunt in "How Thinking like a Blue Jay Can Support Your ESG Strategy."

Our Safety Cultures Are Preparing Us Positively for Environmental Stewardship

In the article "Environmental Stewardship and Safety" by Anna Davis and Adrienne Jones, they wrote, "Emphasizing safety and environmental stewardship focuses on both the how and the why behind the effort. After all, safety is not just about physical habits but it's also about our attitudes and emotions. Our attitude affects almost all that we do and how we do it. If you have a positive safety attitude, it's more likely that you exhibit safe behaviors and inspire others to do the same. In this same manner, we each can implement and model environmental stewardship, along with safe work practices, in order to cultivate and inspire change in our profession."

Climate Change Impacts Our Work, but We Can Be Involved in Facilitating Change

"Major weather events are becoming more severe and frequent, and changes in the utility forest, such as severe insect infestations, have caused an increase in the likelihood of tree failures," cautioned John Goodfellow in the July/August Spotlight on the Environment. "These physical and biological changes impacting the operation and maintenance of electric utility assets are at least part attributed to a changing climate, as more heat energy is in earth's



Nurturing Nature and Growth at ACRT Pacific: Tristan Hoffman

Tristan Hoffman joined the ACRT Services family of companies in 2019 and brought a wealth of knowledge and a passion for trees and nature that has been evident ever since.



Tristan Hoffman

When asked why he chose this industry, Hoffman shared, “I love trees and nature, and enjoy talking to people about their trees.”

Hoffman currently serves as a pre-inspection manager. He enjoys learning about new attributes of trees, tree growth, and their life cycles. Being outside and observing trees firsthand is one of the aspects he loves most about his job.

Looking back to when he joined ACRT Pacific five years ago, Hoffman said he was drawn by the career growth opportunities, the chance to work outdoors, and the opportunity to share his extensive tree knowledge and passion with others.

He advised those looking to enter the industry, “Try to brush up on local tree growth rates and species, take a class about trees, or seek an apprenticeship with a local tree crew. Educational experience is always a plus.”

Two notable events in Hoffman’s tenure were receiving the Going Extra Mile (G.E.M.) Award and being selected to participate in ACRT Services’ Honors Program, a multiday leadership program dedicated to training up-and-coming employees throughout the organization.

Reflecting on his time with the organization, Hoffman expressed his gratitude, stating, “ACRT Pacific has been a great company to work with for the past five years, and I am so grateful to be a part of such a caring community.”

Hoffman holds a Bachelor of Science in marine, freshwater, and environmental biology from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. He is also a certified International Society of Arboriculture Arborist and has credentials in Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), Certified Treecare Safety Professional (CTSP), and OSHA 30.

Learn more about our employee-owners like Tristan at pacificacrt.com.

atmosphere and the world’s oceans...[but] forests are dynamic and adaptive systems. The good news is that over time forests will adapt naturally, but their time frame may be longer than we all would like.”

There Is a Rich History and a Very Positive Side to Regulatory Changes

In “Environmental Law: Get Ready for a Wild Ride,” Lawrence Kahn wrote, “Regulatory changes have required UVM managers to adapt, ensuring their work doesn’t harm protected species and complies with legal requirements, all while supporting conservation efforts. This evolving legal landscape has provided many opportunities for professional arborists, enriching the field’s expertise.”

It feels like we are on the verge of another paradigm shift. This is an exciting time for our industry. The best-in-class utilities have good vegetation management programs in place and have moved beyond reliability. We can see the expectations we set for ourselves a decade ago are already being surpassed.

Now the conversations are moving to discussing long-term UVM programs and how our increased investments of time and money into our programs were well spent—not just saving money and improving our balance sheets but creating a positive and lasting impact to our stakeholders and communities. And we now have years of data supported by technology to back that up, along with a history of lessons learned. The future is bright, and as we face new and evolving challenges, we will be ready to adapt. 🌱

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COURTESY OF HEATHER STERANKA

Heather (age 7) and her brother, Mike (age 5), climbing trees.

Women in UVM: Partnering for Progress

By Heather Steranka, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Lewis Services

When I was a young girl in Ohio, we had a tree house in our backyard. From June through August every year, my siblings and I would basically live in that tree house. We climbed up and down all day, swung from the branches, got scraped up and dirty—and we loved it. I don't remember exactly when or why we stopped playing in it, but we did. Today, when I visit my parents' home (30+ years later), the tree house is long gone, but you can still see marks on the tree where it used to be.

I had not thought about that tree house for years until I started working at Lewis Services in 2023. The first time I visited a working crew in Baltimore, I saw someone working 60 feet up in a tree. The sun was shining through the leaves, there was a light breeze, and I could smell the freshly cut wood. It was exhilarating. It made me think back to the tree house.

As a girl, I had no idea that you could climb trees for a living. I wondered, if I had known this, would my career path have been different? As I observed the crew, I also noticed that there were no women on the team. Looking back, I know that my sister and I were much better climbers than my brother, but neither of us ever considered working in forestry or vegetation management.

Representation Matters

I started to wonder why there weren't any women on this crew. I quickly learned that women only represent around 3% of workers in the field at Lewis. More research revealed that women are underrepresented across the VM, forestry, and arboriculture fields—not just at Lewis. This led to internal company conversations about the challenge of recruiting and retaining women in our field.

As the director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Lewis Services, I know that in today's competitive job market, we

want to do everything we can to make sure we have great people and that our workforce represents the diversity in our communities and people we serve. If half of the population identifies as women, then we must do a lot better at attracting and retaining women in our industry.

Fortunately, I work for Lewis Services, and we are not afraid to take on challenging issues. I had a conversation with our Chief Operating Officer Dennis Brown and Chief Human Resources Officer Mike O'Connor, and they wholeheartedly agreed. Brown introduced me to the co-founders and lead instructors of the Women's Tree Climbing Workshop®, Bear LeVangie and Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll. I was already inspired to make change at Lewis, but after one conversation with these dynamic leaders, I was ready to take on the world.

Female Pioneers in VM

LeVangie Ingersoll and LeVangie have been doing physical work in VM for more than 20 years. Each has served individually as president of the New England Chapter International Society of Arboriculture. Their work as leaders in our industry has taken them around the world. They actively promote VM,



Heather Steranka

COURTESY OF HEATHER STERANKA

forestry, and arboriculture as careers for all—and for women in particular. Through their company, Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop, they have created informational and educational materials and have led grassroots efforts to bring awareness to the industry. Their love and passion for this industry comes through in everything they do. Above all, they want to share that passion with the next generation of people working in VM, forestry, and arboriculture. Lewis Services is proud to be a contributor to their important work through the Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop Scholarship fund.

In conversations with Bear and Melissa, we discussed how Lewis Services and the Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop could work together to address some of the reasons as to why women are underrepresented in

video series on “Women in Vegetation Management.” Through this series of real conversations, we will take on some challenging questions including:

- What can we do to attract more women to the industry?
- How do we retain and develop the women who are currently in the field?
- What kinds of barriers do women face in moving up in our organization?
- Why do women leave our organization and industry?
- What do men need to be aware of and understand to be better allies?

These candid conversations between Bear, Melissa, and Bill Conn (Lewis Supervisor and Certified Arborist) are shared with our entire staff in live online sessions. They are also available 24/7 via our internal learning management system.

(Left to right) Bear LeVangie, Heather Steranka, and Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll.



It’s been awesome to see Lewis’ commitment to action and having real conversations about women in vegetation management. We’re very excited to be on this journey with them.

Bear LeVangie and Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll, Co-Founders and Lead Instructors of the Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop

COURTESY OF WOMEN’S TREE CLIMBING WORKSHOP

the frontlines of our industry. We know we cannot do this alone. We have to start having real conversations about why women don’t know about or don’t seem to be interested in the field. *And* for our current women employees, how can we do a better job of helping them grow their careers? We have to get real about what we can do as organizations, as leaders, and as individuals.

Listening, Learning, Leading

Therefore, Lewis Services and Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop are currently collaborating on a 4-part interactive

This is just the beginning. Our goal is to spark continuing conversations at all levels of the organization and inspire our current employees about what is possible. We want to learn about how we can better retain and attract women to our industry and uncover barriers and biases that can hold us back. We are encouraging open dialogue to allow innovative solutions. We know we cannot do this alone, and we must start having real conversations—because if we don’t start, we will never see the change that we know is possible. †

“Climb like a Girl”

By Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll and Bear LeVangie, Co-Founders, Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop

Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop® (WTCW) was founded in 2009 to answer the call of so many people who asked, “Where’d you learn how to climb?”

Since 2009, WTCW has had more than 3,000 people—predominantly women—participate in our climbing programs. Our mission is to build confidence and skills that people can use for the rest of their lives, focused within arboriculture. The testimonials from participants, co-workers, and supervisors alike have been continuously regenerative and affirming that our path was meant to be.

Though the phrase “(Fill in the blank) like a girl” had a negative connotation when we were growing up, people—particularly women—wanted to own it. “Climb like a Girl” was adopted from the rock-climbing community, recognizing (especially in the rock-climbing world) that women and girls do things differently—and different isn’t bad or not good enough. WTCW proudly wears “Climb like a Girl” to show people that, yes, women also climb. And though it may be done differently, we get the *job done right*.

WTCW is fortunate to have a team of 18 people across North America who help to support and elevate our mission. We feel blessed to work with so many talented women who know their paths support the education and development of others in the industry.

For more information about Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop, visit www.womenstreeclimbingworkshop.com. †



Women’s Tree Climbing Workshop 2024 reTREET.

Trees in Qatar

By Mohammad Mujtaba Hamidy,
Senior Infrastructure Engineer,
Ministry of Municipality-Qatar



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Qatar is a small peninsula country in the Persian Gulf, sharing its only land border with Saudi Arabia on its south while it shares its sea with surrounding countries, including Bahrain, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Recently Qatar hosted the 2022 World Cup finals, which has been considered one of the best, if not the best. The country has gone through a tremendous transformation in the last few decades. Through the discovery of the largest natural gas reserve just north of its shore (North Gas Field) in 1971, Qatar has been able to establish itself as the biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas. And with great leadership, it has managed this wealth exceptionally well, resulting in it being one of the richest countries per capita in world.

Qatar has developed and modernized itself on all frontiers, including health, education, and overall infrastructure. However, such a rapid modernization journey has left some gaps—one such gap being the inadequate installation of green infrastructure. In particular: trees. Now that the rapid speed of the projects has slowed down, it is an opportune time for Qatar to start focusing on its green infrastructure to make the state one of the most livable globally.

Based on the United Nations and various other international indices, some of the key elements that measure livability of a city are its walkability, ambient environment, and green infrastructure, which all rely on the placement of trees in urban areas.

According to the European Commission, green infrastructure is defined as “a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, while also enhancing biodiversity.” Here we must emphasize the word “planned,” and accordingly it is the Infrastructure Planning Department of Ministry of Municipality in Qatar (IPD-MM) that is responsible and should plan a network or semi-network of natural ecosystems in coordination with other key stakeholders (e.g., Ministry of Environment, Public Works Authority, etc.).

Keeping this responsibility in mind, first one must understand Qatar’s natural environment, which is extremely dry with only 80 mm of rain annually. Hence, its flora and fauna are limited, as it is a desert country with very little vegetation.

Qatar obtains all its portable water from desalinations. Given that water is

a high-value commodity, it is recycled through the sewerage network and recirculated throughout the country for various uses. This recycled water, known as Treated Sewage Effluent (TSE), is used for irrigating farms, road landscaping, parks, and various other uses, such as district cooling. Qatar having a population of 2.8 million people produces adequate TSE in order to service the growing requirements for the country’s green infrastructure.

In addition to TSE, there is also plentiful shallow groundwater (caused primarily due to pressure pipe leaks) which gets captured and redirected through a network of stormwater pipes, and is also used for irrigation purposes. It is also worth noting that Qatar’s main natural tree is *Ziziphus spina*, which is known as Sidra, and is classified as the national tree of Qatar. Given the harsh climate of Qatar, such trees require little water while simultaneously providing adequate shade all year long.

It is widely accepted throughout the globe that trees have an enormous positive impact on an urban setting, ranging from reducing green gas emission, significantly improving air quality, and most importantly for Qatar’s case, reducing the temperature—which

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Figure 1. Hierarchy of selecting the locations for planting trees

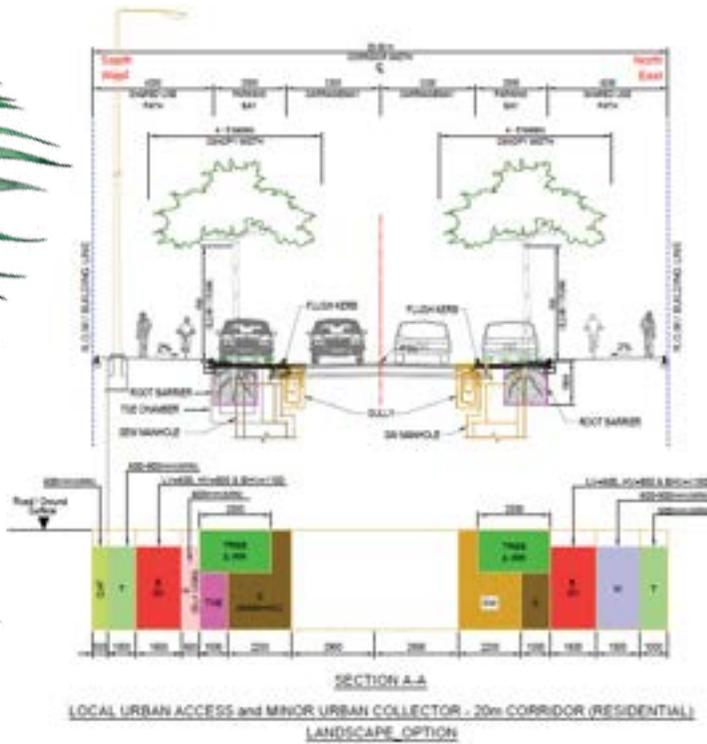


Figure 2. Typical Ministry of Municipality proposed road cross section for a 20 meter ROW



Figure 3. Typical arrangements of trees above existing utilities

can reach temperatures as high as 50 degrees Celsius between June and September and impact the overall workability of the city and its urban surrounding.

Factoring its benefits, Qatar’s government recently launched its ten million tree initiative. The challenge is to place these trees in locations where they will provide maximum benefit. There’s a myriad of evidence that placing trees in the urban areas will give the state the optimum benefits from this investment. Therefore, a comprehensive plan needs to be developed to install trees spatially in the city as well as the urban areas.

The strategy that needs to be adopted by the government should aim to pick the *low-hanging fruits* first. This means trees should be installed in areas that are within the government’s control first, and then move to more difficult areas, such as private properties where governmental jurisdiction is limited. Although tree planting within a private property is challenging, through building permits, the government may consider enforcing policies that all new dwellings must have trees in their yard.

Figure 1 displays the hierarchal order needing to be established as part of its implementation.

A significant portion of these trees will be installed in the nominated parks (148 designated parks throughout Qatar) but also in the so-called “open spaces,” including near metro stations, sporting facilities like stadiums, recreational areas like water frontages (e.g., Cornish), as well as public amenities like mosques, schools, hospitals, and various other government buildings.

Notwithstanding the above locations, perhaps the most impactful tree planting takes place in the rights-of-way, where the most benefit can be gained. As a result, the spatial location of them must be clearly demarcated throughout the urban areas of Qatar both in the new as well as in the existing developments. In the new subdivisions, the Ministry of Municipality, who are responsible for standardizing the typical cross sections, has recently revised the typical cross sections and adopted the placement of trees on verges of the road where deep utilities, such as stormwater drainage and sewerage pipes, are placed. Please refer to Figure 2 as an example of the revised typical cross section.

In the existing roads, it is more challenging to plant trees due to existing subsurface utilities as well as surface elements within a ROW, such as pavements, concrete curbs, driveways, streetlight poles for



overstory

foot and cycle paths, and more. Hence, surgical planning and execution methodologies are being developed to ensure trees are placed in the best available spaces throughout the existing roadways. To simplify determining the location of trees along the verges of roads, we can break a road corridor into different segments, which include the following:

- **Buffers** are defined as the area between the ROW and the property boundary. Such areas are demarcated for possible future expansion of the road. However, by large, these areas are empty and the ideal locations to install trees.
- **Gaps within ROW** are areas on the verges of the roads away from the main carriageway and where the roots do not interfere with the subsurface utilities.
- **Above existing deep utilities**, such as sewerage and stormwater drainage pipes, are ideal locations for planting trees as they give the roots of trees adequate space to properly grow.
- **Above existing subsurface, shallow utilities**, such as electricity, telecommunication, and pressure pipes, are perhaps the most challenging places to install trees. However, there has been an abundance of work carried out by consultants to prove that tree planting can take place on top shallow services. Such practices have generally been rejected by the service agencies in Qatar. An ongoing technical assessment and consultation with utility agencies are being carried out at the time of writing this article to gain the agencies' agreement (see **Figure 3**).

Once all the areas and corridors have been identified, a deployment program must then be developed. This program should consider the availability of current irrigation (TSE) networks and subsequently the future deployment of TSE networks should be aligned with tree installations.

In conclusion, Qatar has gone through a remarkable urban development phase. However, it is lagging in its livability goals and objectives. One of the key drivers to achieve this ambitious goal will be to install trees in its urban areas, which will reduce air temperature, clean air pollution, and overall encourage walking and physical activity. Qatar, similar to many other Gulf countries, has a very harsh environment where it rarely rains and desalinated water is primarily used as the main source of water. However, Qatar has built a state-of-the-art water recycling network and treatment that allows it to provide adequate irrigation for achieving its noble goal of planting ten million+ trees.

A strategy must be developed that first considers the areas that can be easily planted, including being within government controls and having access to irrigation networks. Then, more complicated areas should be considered whether through the development of policies for the private sector or the more complicated arrangements of placing trees above utilities—eventually, a very analytical and spatially viable program must be developed to deploy this vision. Qatar, like many other countries of the region, has very lofty goals to make herself a much more livable state, and planting trees throughout its urban areas will be a key step towards this goal. 🌱



Going the Extra Mile for Innovation and Community: Phil Chen

At Overstory, we're proud to shine a light on our Strategic Solutions Lead Phil Chen. Boldly driving innovation in vegetation management (and with a heart for the community behind it), Chen brings Overstory's mission to life every day, helping us provide actionable vegetation intelligence for safer, more reliable power.



Phil Chen

Before joining Overstory, Chen spent nearly a decade at CN Utility Consulting, where he provided critical operational and management consulting services to VM departments across North America. His curiosity and on-the-ground experience yielded industry-leading expertise in urban forestry, utility asset management, and tree risk assessment. He has served as a member of the Right-of-Way Stewardship Council since 2022 and has been a member of the UAA for more than 10 years. Chen co-founded the UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee, serving as its Chair from 2019–2022, and has contributed to several task forces developing guidance documents on managing compatible species and invasive weeds.

But Chen's dedication goes beyond his resume. This September, he participated in his third Tour des Trees, a tough 420-mile cycling event with nearly 19,000 feet of elevation—all in support of the TREE Fund, an organization dedicated to advancing research and education in urban forestry. Chen joined nearly 100 riders in this event, planting trees and connecting with locals along the way, leaving a lasting impact even beyond the donations.

At Overstory, Chen shares his passion and prowess with our utility customers, coaching them on practical ways they can put their vegetation intelligence to work to optimize their operations programs for a safer, more reliable future.

We're proud to have Phil Chen as part of the Overstory team, and we look forward to supporting him as he continues to go the extra mile—both on and off the road. Learn more about our work, and Phil's, on overstory.com. 🌱

OPINION EDITORIAL

The Importance of Designating Your System of Record

By Chris Kelly, CEO, Clearion



Chris Kelly

More than ever before, today's vegetation managers need to construct data strategies that not only provide immediate organizational value but also establish the framework for future data access and long-term decision-making.

Consider a few of the objectives that are important in today's UVM environment:

- Improving the quality, consistency, and accessibility of data across the full chain of custody (e.g., work identification, planning, notification, permission, assignment, execution, audit)
- Capturing detailed, end-to-end, multiyear records of all actions taken on your system among multiple contractors
- Generating productivity and quality comparisons among contractors and managing to agreed-upon KPIs
- Meeting industry regulatory requirements including record keeping and reporting of environmental practices (e.g., herbicide spraying)
- Managing the growing liability and reputational risks including storm response and wildfire mitigation
- Leveraging incremental sources of data including GIS/geospatial data and remote sensing such as LiDAR and satellite analytics
- Managing via sophisticated, real-time dashboards and analytics
- Responding rapidly to customer trim requests and complaint tickets via call centers or online forms
- Streamlining business processes and reducing operating expenses

As data is increasingly becoming the backbone of every vegetation management operation, deploying the right system of record can mean the difference between simply meeting

short-term goals and, importantly, managing to long-term outcomes across your system.

WHAT IS A SYSTEM OF RECORD?

A system of record (SoR) is a centralized data management system that serves as the authoritative source for critical business data within an organization. In the world of vegetation management, this may translate to accurate, up-to-date records such as asset locations, vegetation encroachment, danger trees, full chain of custody for field work, and more. When deployed successfully, an SoR enables data analysis, trending, dashboard reporting, and decision-making across a wide range of stakeholders. However, with many different systems in place, both internal and external, it can be difficult to determine which should be designated as your SoR.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

While evaluating systems to determine which should be designated as your SoR, it's crucial to consider several key factors which collectively play a vital role in ensuring the SoR supports your current needs and scales with your business as it grows.

Data Ownership

When working with external service providers (e.g., remote sensing), it's crucial to understand who owns the data and if access becomes restricted or limited when your relationship ends. Before signing on the dotted line even during a pilot stage, clarify whether (a) you'll be able to download or export your data and (b) there are any time limits or fees associated with this process. Understanding these terms ensures you maintain control over your data and can access it when needed, even if you're no longer using the service.

Data Access and Interoperability

Smooth access and interoperability mean that you can easily layer your vegetation management data to

communicate effectively with all systems and applications within your utility, allowing for consistent data flow, minimal disruption, enhanced efficiency, and data availability for analytics. Key factors to consider include the availability of APIs or pre-built connectors, the ease of data synchronization, and how well the system aligns with your existing workflows. A system that integrates seamlessly should require minimal manual intervention, preserve data integrity, and support your team's productivity by ensuring that all platforms work together harmoniously.

Consider fire risk management. From a liability perspective, utilities today must not only identify high-risk areas but also tie together, using spatial data, the actions taken to mitigate the risks (e.g., detailed inspection and maintenance data). Beyond record keeping, this data becomes key when managing fire insurance policy renewals or seeking reduced premiums.

Consider customer communications. Can you generate reports tying your call center data to your vegetation management actions? If a customer calls about property damage or unauthorized spraying near their chicken coop, can the complaint be routed to the appropriate contractor? Importantly, can the call center view how, and how quickly, the complaint was resolved to close the case?

Vendor Independence and Compatibility

In today's competitive environment, shifting resources among contractors has become a necessity. However, this can become a challenge when one uses a proprietary system making it difficult for another contractor to pick up where they left off without licenses, access, or support from the original provider.

To ease the concern, it's crucial to negotiate clear terms from the outset that include access rights, data portability, and the possibility of

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transitioning to a different contractor, if needed. This might involve securing data export capabilities that can be transferred to a new platform. If these provisions weren't in place initially, you may need to renegotiate with the original contractor to obtain the necessary access or transition tools, which could incur additional costs and time.

A thorough assessment of the proprietary system's dependencies and potential challenges of transitioning should be conducted before switching contractors, ensuring that your operations remain uninterrupted.

Building and maintaining an SoR separate from a services or data provider is the best way to ensure procurement flexibility and reduce overhead associated with software transitions.

Geospatial Foundation

While enterprise resource planning systems (e.g., Maximo, SAP) often serve as an organization's SoR for vegetation management, they're not inherently spatial (i.e., asset-management versus land-based). An effective SoR for vegetation management operations should be GIS- or map-based to capture precise geospatial details such as pollinator habitats, spray restrictions, and circuit-specific work.

Multiyear Vantage Point

Ensuring you maintain a historical record

of all actions taken on your system over time including property-specific details (e.g., irate customer, dangerous canine, endangered wildlife habitat) requires accurate record keeping and multiyear data availability/access when needed.

Consider near-term and long-standing customer commitments (e.g., approval from planner to tree contractor to remove tree if stump is ground, trees have conditional approval/do not trim before October 15, agreed to call 24 hours in advance of arrival, or agreed to place tarp over vehicle in driveway). Effective communication and adherence to plan can mitigate costly mistakes.

WHY NOW?

For vegetation managers, designating a system of record is fundamental to the integrity and efficiency of your operations today and tomorrow. They not only ensure the accuracy and security of essential data but also serve as the backbone for informed decision-making and strategic planning. As vegetation organizations continue to evolve in an increasingly digital landscape, the role of these systems becomes even more critical, enabling seamless operations, ensuring compliance, and fostering trust across all levels of the business. Investing in a robust and adaptable SoR is not just a technological imperative but a strategic necessity for sustainable growth and long-term success. 🌱

What data should you store?

- Planned pruning and removals
- Work in Fire Risk Areas (FRA)
- Herbicide applications
- Customer Trim Requests (CTR)
- Emergency work
- Tree-caused outage details
- Pework notification and signed permission
- Sensitive customer information
- Customer agreements
 - One-time (e.g., conditional approval or special crew instructions)
 - Ongoing (e.g., 24-hour notice for property access)
- Worker safety data
 - Contractor safety and compliance
 - Hazardous field conditions
- Environmental data and restrictions
 - Capture in your GIS or Vegetation Work Management System (VWMS)
- Wildfire risk data
- Everything!

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