

Taking ISA to New Heights – Literally

Tanja Grmovsek – A Profile in Professionalism

In the 21st century, one of the quickest ways to learn about someone is to type their name in an Internet search engine such as Google. The tactic is so common people immediately know what you mean when you refer to “Googling” someone.

The results posted when the name Tanja Grmovsek is Googled do not immediately lead you to believe she is an internationally-acclaimed arborist who was recognized as a “True Professional of Arboriculture” by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), which happened in the summer of 2010. Rather, there are several examples of Grmovsek’s stellar career as a mountain climber; a career that helped chart the course for her trailblazing efforts in arboriculture in her native Slovenia.

In her brief professional career, Grmovsek has opened her own consulting business, become the first Certified Arborist in Slovenia and was one of the founders of the Slovenian Society of Arboriculture.

Throughout the world, Grmovsek scaled some of the highest and most difficult peaks while gaining a great appreciation for nature, especially the abundance of trees in her homeland. Slovenia has just two million residents, but nearly 60% of the country is tree-covered.

“I talk about trees to anybody who will listen,” Grmovsek said. “I like to turn on a little light in someone’s mind by telling them something interesting or useful about trees. It is important to inform municipality employees, mayors, architects, and building contractors, since all of them have a huge impact on trees in urban areas.”

While studying forestry in school, Grmovsek made the connection between her passion – mountain climbing – and what was to become her profession – arboriculture.

“While I traveled the world I saw a lot of empty land with no trees, so I understood what a treasure we truly have in Slovenia,” she said. “That treasure we take too much for granted. When I studied Urban Forestry I began to learn about arboriculture. I started observing and learning from trees while climbing and working on them. Later I transferred a lot from my climbing experiences into my arboriculture business!”

Today, Slovenia has roughly 40 arborists, a small number but still an increase from 2004 when Grmovsek went into the tree-care profession.

“The learning phase took longer than I hoped, and it is still going on,” she said. “I studied modern arboriculture and was hungry for



Tanja Grmovsek

new knowledge. I was really a beginner, a true ‘greenhorn.’ I had the same feeling when I began climbing but then I had mentors in our Alpine Club. There was really no one to learn from since ‘topping’ was a common practice for tree care in Slovenia, and I didn’t want to do that.

“From the beginning I worked with other tree climber-based companies on old trees that were protected, with difficult access for heavy machines, so I could use my climbing skills. There was also consulting work from municipalities, which I enjoyed because it challenged my brain as well as my physical abilities.”

In 2007, Grmovsek started her own consulting company and never looked back.

“Arboriculture was something completely new for the general public and ‘arborists’ didn’t exist yet, so I kind of jumped right in to cold water,” she said. “I still get questions from gardening and horticultural companies asking if I am getting enough business.

"From the beginning I was supported by my hometown municipality in Maribor, who hired me for consulting work. More support came when I became an ISA Certified Arborist and my circle of clients expanded. I'm kind of a connecting point between owner, general public, and execution tree care companies."

Grmovsek remains diligent in her efforts to educate Slovene residents, municipalities and tree care companies about proper tree care methods. One of just two ISA Certified Arborists in the country, she is a strong advocate of establishing and enforcing tree care regulations. She finds interest in tree care growing among her fellow countrymen.

"I get a lot of good feedback from people after I explain to them what we are doing to the trees, why it needs to be done, and what the trees' needs are," she said. "When people see you truly care about trees and know a lot about them, they trust you. That's a good feeling."

Another good feeling came when Grmovsek became the first Slovenian to achieve ISA certification.

"It was my big challenge and a longtime wish to complete the ISA certification exam," she said. "I think it was a good decision. As the first Slovenian I dared to bite into this, to see on paper how much I truly know about different topics, and to do that in my second language.

"What I like the most is that you have to obtain Continuing Education Units to renew your certificate, so you have to stay up to date!" 🌿

The "True Professionals of Arboriculture" award, sponsored by STIHL, recognizes those individuals who demonstrate practices of educating the public about the profession of arboriculture and the benefits of trees.



Above: An experienced mountain climber, Grmovsek is used to being heads above the rest. One of only about 40 arborists in Slovenia, she was the first to achieve ISA certification.

Below: Grmovsek shows a big tree some big love.



Tactics of a True Professional: What Can Be Learned from Tanja Grmovsek

- **Promote your ISA Certification.** A great way to build trust among customers and potential customers is to show you are certified by the international leader in your industry. Also, Continuing Education Units ensure you remain up-to-date with the latest arboriculture knowledge and information.
- **Persevere.** Let nothing stand in the way of doing what you truly enjoy. If your career reaches a roadblock, find a way to get over, around, or through it by seeking out the people or resources to help you successfully reach the other side.
- **Educate civic officials.** Whether you are a municipal arborist or you work for someone who owns a private firm, take the time to explain to city leaders you meet formally and informally about the work you do and why it benefits the public. The financial and legislative decisions these officials make may impact your work today or in the future.
- **Self-educate.** Read what is available in print and online about the latest in arboriculture and tree care. Begin with the ISA website www.isa-arbor.org. Click on the *Education & Research* or *Resources* tabs for a variety of information, including Tree Ordinance Guidelines, Multi-lingual Online Dictionary, Science and Research Literature, information on Public Education and Outreach, and much more.

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*The International Society of Arboriculture's
2010 True Professionals of Arboriculture award
is presented by STIHL.*



The International Society of Arboriculture launched the “True Professionals of Arboriculture” program in 2009 to increase public understanding of arboriculture and the professional skills of today’s arborists. Seven individuals were selected as recipients in the first year, indicative of the highly-trained professionals who work safely and smartly to protect the health and long-term value provided by trees to homeowners and communities. The program award is sponsored by STIHL, Inc.

In early 2010, ISA began accepting nominations for the second group of “True Professionals.” More than 45 nominations were collected from the industry’s leading arborists and subsequently reviewed by the judging committee. The panel reviewed the entries and selected five arborists representing various attributes of professionalism including a commitment to community outreach and education, innovation in client communication techniques and unique achievements linking arboriculture with the general public.

2010 True Professionals of Arboriculture:

- **Dr. William Fountain** – Lexington, Ky.
- **Steve Geist** – Denver, Colo.
- **Tanja Grmovsek** – Maribor, Slovenia
- **Scott Prophet** – Loganville, Ga.
- **Mike Robinson** – Jacksonville, Fla.

Biographies on each of the “True Professionals” are attached.

The 2010 ISA “True Professionals of Arboriculture” judging committee included:

- Tim Gamma – president, ISA
- Justin Hancock – senior online garden editor, *Better Home & Gardens*
- Jill Johnson – coordinator, Federal Urban & Community Forestry
- Dan Lambe – vice president of programs, National Arbor Day Foundation
- Sandra Mason – horticulture extension educator, University of Illinois Extension
- Tom Mugridge – membership committee chair, ISA
- Melinda Myers – author, broadcaster
- Philip van Wassenae – president, Urban Forest Innovations, Inc. and 2009 “True Professionals of Arboriculture” recipient

2010 True Professionals of Arboriculture Recipients

Dedication and Leadership in the Field



Steve Geist
Plant Pathologist
Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care
Denver, Colo.

Steve Geist joined ISA in 1986, and was awarded an honorary lifetime membership in 2003 in recognition of his contributing efforts in the industry. His work as a consultant on matters of plant health and lawn and tree care has been widely recognized throughout arboriculture circles.

He has had more than 10 written works published during his successful career. Geist is also instrumental to ISA's Rocky Mountain Chapter, having previously served as its president, newsletter editor, and as a speaker/organizer of numerous chapter level educational and outreach events. Geist is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist that has volunteered

countless hours in advancing the profession.

Active in many organizations aside from ISA Geist is tireless in his attempts to educate others about the importance of fundamental arboricultural practice and knowledge. He is a Tour de Trees rider and has been an active spokesman for the industry making dozens of speeches to turfgrass associations, university students, ISA regional and national meeting attendees and other professional arboriculture associations.

"We've all had to get a lot wiser over the years," Geist said. "A business strategy has to be more just hanging out a shingle. Marketing in general had to be better, along with budgeting and cashflow. Your level of service has to be better than the next guy and you have to be a leader or you get left behind."

Geist has served since 2005 on the ISA Board Certified Master Arborist Test Committee. Also in 2005 he was awarded the ISA Outstanding Service Award for his many achievements in the field. Geist's colleagues describe him as an outstanding role model to junior-level professionals. According to those that know him best, Geist is as an exceptional communicator, bright, articulate, and an inspiration to his peers.



Slovenia's Rising Star

Tanja Grmovsek
Owner / Arborist
Nega dreves ARBORIST
Tanja Grmovsek s.p.
Maribor, Slovenia

Tanja Grmovsek is first ISA Certified Arborist in Slovenia, a nation of two million people whose land is 60% forest. She has

been working in arboriculture since 2004 and started her own company, "Arborist," in 2007. Her passion for nature and love of mountain climbing influenced her decision to study forestry at the University of Ljubljana where she specialized in Urban Forestry and began learning the nuances of arboriculture. Grmovsek has worked on projects for municipalities and private companies across Slovenia.

Because there were no books about arboriculture written in the Slovene language, the words "arborist" and "arboriculture" are foreign to many. Grmovsek has dedicated herself to spreading messages of proper tree care to those unfamiliar with many basic arboricultural concepts. Grmovsek began collecting various pieces of information about modern arboriculture practices via the internet and books purchased from ISA web store. She

described it as an "information explosion" when she learned how refined the profession had become in other parts of the world. According to Grmovsek, many municipalities and tree care companies in Slovenia do not practice modern arboricultural techniques – to the point that topping is still a common practice. As such, Grmovsek is diligent in her efforts to educate the public, municipalities and tree care companies about proper tree care methods, and she is a strong advocate of establishing and enforcing tree care regulations in Slovenia.

Grmovsek hopes to play an instrumental role in one day developing an ISA chapter in Slovenia. She was influential in establishing the Slovene Arboriculture Association in 2008, which now has 40 members.

"I like to talk about trees to anybody who is willing to listen," Grmovsek said. "I like to turn on a little light in someone's mind by telling them something interesting or useful about trees. Most people like trees and care about them, but there is not enough good information about proper tree care in Slovenia. It important to inform municipality employees, mayors, architects and building contractors, since all of them have a huge impact on trees in urban areas."

Recently her municipality established the first ordinances for trees in Slovenia prohibiting the topping of trees. According to Grmovsek, more and more municipalities are planning to follow suit and are consulting her for perspective.



Spreading the Word in Southeast Asia

Dr. Bill Fountain
Extension Professor of Arboriculture
and Landscape Management
Univ. of Kentucky Horticulture
Department, Lexington, Ky.

Dr. Bill Fountain serves on the ISA Board, is an honorary lifetime member and ISA Board Certified Master Arborist and is an active member of the

Kentucky Arborists' Association. He works cooperatively with industry leaders involved in production, installation and maintenance of landscape plant materials and the consumers of these products. Dr. Fountain has dedicated a large portion of his professional work life to the National Junior Horticultural Association – the only organization that specifically serves youth ages 9 to 21 interested in competitive and educational activities related to the horticultural sciences.

As part of his communication outreach efforts, Dr. Fountain regularly produces arboriculture-centric public service announcements in conjunction with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service that appear in print and on radio and television. In addition to assisting arborists in preparation for the ISA Certified Arborist, Utility Specialist, and Municipal

Specialist exams, he works with municipalities and municipal arborists across the Commonwealth, encouraging the use of certified arborists in science-based techniques for proper management of the urban landscape.

"It is important that arborists provide the best professional recommendation they can to a client, though sometimes what is said is not what they want to hear," Fountain said. "That recommendation must also be what is best for the client and their trees, not what is best for the professional."

Dr. Fountain has conducted a number of arborist training programs in

Southeast Asia that prepare resident arborists for the ISA Certified Arborist exam. He helped establish training programs in Singapore and Malaysia that are not only self-sustaining, but are now expanding their reach into other areas. It is Dr. Fountain's goal to develop a public and industry appreciation for a diversity of species, the essential role plant materials play in making our urban and suburban areas safe and livable and the cultural requirements essential to keep our green infrastructure healthy and sustainable.



Safety First. Always.

Scott Prophett
President & Lead Instructor, North
American Training Solutions
Loganville, Ga.

Scott Prophett has been an arborist for more than 25 years. His company is focused on meeting the training and business needs of private, industrial, municipal, and commercial entities where specialized training is needed. Prophett teaches classes and hosts seminars on

safety for organizations around the world. He is passionate about assisting organizations in skill training, team building, standard operating procedures, occupational hazard compliance and strengthening business practices.

Prophett is an ISA Certified Arborist and Certified Tree Worker, as well as a founding member of the ISA Safety Committee. Outside of ISA activities, Prophett has been active in the Tree Care Industry Association serving on several safety committees, and he has lectured at several Urban Forestry Conferences. He is also heavily involved in the Tree Climbing Championships and is a member and chair of the ITCC Rules & Operations

Committee. Prophett has also been a regular speaker and seminar instructor at the ISA Annual Conference, and he has contributed several articles to Arborist News and Tree Care Industry Magazine detailing the latest tree care safety initiatives and climbing techniques.

"My energy is on safety and skills techniques, because a safe arborist will better serve the customer and the public. We see some of the equipment and the way arborists were using it that we thought was normal 10-20 years ago is not as safe as it could be. Arborists are geniuses and will make something work whether it was designed for a specific use or not."

Among his colleagues, Prophett is described as cutting-edge in arboriculture safety with a knack for relating to both the tree worker and business executive. A true safety pioneer, Prophett is someone who both "teaches it and lives it." Since honing his skills as an instructor, Prophett has created a de facto "army" of safety evangelists in the arboricultural community who help spread his messages of proper technique and safety. Prophett ensures his own employees participate in annual week-long training seminars to stay sharp and updated. He has gone so far as to patent his own creations of various arborist supplies. Because of his work, many arborists are now able to work more efficiently and with better precision. The ripple effect Prophett has on the industry continues to expand.



Excellence in Utility Arboriculture

Mike Robinson
Forester, JEA
Jacksonville, Fla.

An ISA Certified Arborist and Certified Exam Proctor, Mike Robinson graduated from University of Florida in 1978 with a B.S. in Forest Resources and Conservation. Not long after, Robinson accepted position with JEA as a forester directing line clearance operations in Jacksonville, a role he has

held ever since. At the time, utility arboriculture was just emerging as its own niche in the industry. Since then, the combined efforts of Robinson and JEA have resulted in numerous awards and recognitions for their tree and forestry programs.

Colleagues describe Robinson as "a professional's professional" and someone who is knowledgeable and has an innate ability to multitask. It is not uncommon for Robinson to serve as the community spokesperson regarding utility and tree issues on the local television news, oversee his contractors, teach children the joy of tree planting, and address the ladies' garden club – all in a single day.

"When I started, the monthly electric bill price was the driving issue for consumers," Robinson said. "They didn't care if the lights went out, some even expected it every time a thunderstorm came through. "That has changed. Reliability has become a big issue, especially with computers and home businesses, more so than price. Also, no one paid any attention to green energy or solar power, they were novelty things that flared up and died out. Today it is a major, driving issue."

After a tree removal job caused a neighborhood and civic uproar, Robinson set up a meeting with Jacksonville stakeholders to reach a consensus on tree care by the utility – the resulting group came to be known as the TREE Coalition. The Coalition became a model for similar groups around the country and was featured in "American Forests" magazine. As a representative of the TREE Coalition Robinson implements annual training for the utility's contract line clearance workers. He also instructs at various "Lunch & Learn" classes for ISA members in the tri-county area. As an arborist for a utility, Robinson speaks on electric safety whenever possible and tutors JEA workers as they prepare for the ISA certification exams. In exchange for every hour of tutelage, employees must donate an hour to non-profit groups/services. Robinson is also an integral part of Greenscape's programming, plantings, events and collateral development that contribute the beautification of the city and educates thousands of residents.

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