

Arborist Short Course Provides New Career Paths

The Challenge:

As the number of communities with active urban forestry programs increases, there is a greater need for qualified green industry workers with the necessary skills to perform work associated with planting and caring for trees.

The Solution:

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program developed the Arborist Short Course in 2017. This progressive new program is providing arboriculture training to low-risk incarcerated individuals who often do not have many choices in finding fulfilling careers. This course allows participants to continue to learn on-the-job and advance, which is helping to fill the need for qualified workers in arboriculture and green industry. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) UCF successfully replicated the program a year later. The program continues to gain interest in many States.

PA DCNR worked with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to develop a 5-week course based on the curriculum of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Arborist Certification program. The first course was held in Pennsylvania's Rockview State Correctional Institution's Forestry Camp, where training candidates were already maintaining the grounds, working in the on-site tree nursery, and assisting with forest management. Instructors shared information about trees, including their planting, biology, benefits, care, pruning, and how to assess the risk they pose. Participants also learned about water management and fertilization, soils, tree worker safety, and career opportunities in arboriculture. Many of the 33 participants expressed an interest in continuing to develop their skills and finding jobs in the industry upon their release.



Inmates at Rockview's Forestry Camp participate in a Tree Climbing Workshop hosted by DCNR and Penn State Extension. (Courtesy photo by Shea Zwerver)

Resulting Benefits:

- Upon release, a graduate of the training program received a job offer from the Asplundh Tree Expert Company and continues to work in the industry as a foreman for a smaller tree care business.
- PA DCNR has collectively provided 303 hours of training to 116 participants.
- Sixty-four individuals have been released to date, and at least five are known to be working in the tree care and landscaping/outdoor industry.
- This training brings greater visibility of urban forestry and arboriculture to an underserved population.

Sharing Success:

- A Regional Manager for Davey Tree Expert Company contacted PA DCNR with interest in replicating this training in the Charlotte, NC, area.
- An article about the Pennsylvania training appeared in the May 2018 edition of *Tree Care Industry Magazine*.
- An article about the Ohio training appeared in the May/June 2019 edition of the Ohio ISA Chapter's newsletter *The Buckeye Arborist*.
- The Chesapeake Bay Program published a [website article and video](#) in 2019.

"I have learned so much. I will take what I've learned and use it the best I can and to also educate somebody else. I have become very passionate regarding this field of work, and when I get released, I plan on continuing my education in this."

—Program Participant



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