

Climbing Trees is a Sport Among Arborists!

At 6'4", one might think James Earhart is a basketball player. He is an athlete; however, he competes in a sport you may not be familiar with. James is a certified arborist and an internationally renowned competitive tree climber. Climbing trees is a sport and is becoming increasingly popular around the world!

James, who grew up in Stafford County, now lives in Essex County and is the owner of **Arbor Care: Complete Tree Service**. He has been climbing trees since he was a kid using dog leashes and homemade equipment. At age 14 James saved up his money to purchase professional arbor gear including a harness and ropes. "That was the day I started training for my first Tree Climbing Competition (TCC)", James shared. I had a chance to talk with James and his wife, Stephanie, during the North American Tree Climbing Competition (NATCC) held in Washington DC in October where he placed second place overall.

Tree climbing is both an art and science, and arborists have the required skills, knowledge, and expertise to safely compete in these events. Each TCC has five rigorous events: Work Climb, Aerial Rescue, Throwline, Belayed Speed and Ascent Event. Judges score each competitor on technical skills, speed, accuracy, and safety following the International Tree Climbing Competition (ITCC) standard rules and industry protocols.

At age 15, James attended his first Tree Climbing Competition (TCC) in Fredericksburg and knew then that he wanted to be a competitor. At 18, he competed in the Mid-Atlantic TCC in Truxton Park, MD and placed 16th. That was 2004, and the rest is history.

When asked how many competitions he had participated in, he really did not know and had to tally them up on a piece of paper with input from Stephanie. Too many to count, but he settled on 49. He and Stephanie look forward to going to these events which allow them to travel, often with their 3 kids! They have been to San Antonio, San Diego, Providence, Savannah, and St. Louis and Copenhagen, to name a few TCC locations.

James consistently places in the top of the competitions he enters. He was World Champion at the International Tree Climbing Competition (ITCC) in Tampa in 2015. He then earned the NATCC Championship in 2018 and 2019 and has been the Mid-Atlantic TCC Champion 7 times. James not only has the required skills, knowledge and athleticism for tree climbing, but the respect from fellow competitors. James is kind, supportive and a good sport, always cheering on others.

It's obvious that James has a passion for climbing and a "love of the game". At 38, he is not slowing down. Always training for the next event, he hopes to be invited to be an international guest climber at the European Tree Climbing Competition in Croatia in July 2024!

If you would like to experience a tree climbing competition, the Mid-Atlantic TCC will be held at the Crofton Country Club in Crofton, MD on April 13-14, 2024 and is open to the public. Visit the

Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (MAC-ISA) for more information at www.macisa.com.

Liz Buxton is the Executive Director of the Mid Atlantic Chapter of ISA and lives in the Northern Neck. The mission of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is to promote the professional practice of arboriculture and foster a greater worldwide awareness for the benefits of trees through research, technology, and education.