



State of the Association: A look back and ahead

This speech was presented by Mark Garvin at the annual meeting during Winter Management Conference in February on Grand Cayman.

Since August I have had the privilege of serving, officially, as president of your association. The annual State of the Association address is our opportunity to look back at the year that has passed, review our successes and recognize the areas that didn't go well. I also want to look ahead. The past is past, after all, and it is infinitely less exciting than the future.

I suppose the best way to describe 2010 is this: It was a year of stability and modest recovery. It could also be defined by what didn't happen: We didn't launch massive new projects, we didn't run a deficit, and we didn't unify with PLANET.

What we did accomplish was to turn around some negative trends in finances, membership, and industry involvement with our association, while taking some forward steps to partner with other organizations for the benefit of arboriculture.

Financially, TCIA is in very good shape. We continue to manage revenue and expenses in a conservative fashion. Despite another year of recession, TCIA posted a positive consolidated net income for the fiscal year that ended August 31, 2010. We ended the fiscal year almost \$400,000 ahead of budget. We projected a large deficit for last year and managed to close the books with a modest surplus.

More importantly, the reserves TCIA grew during the good times continued to grow last year, so if your board decides that we want to invest in a major new initiative in the future, we will have the resources to do so.

As an association and for TCIA's staff, the new year is a good time to look back to assess the previous 12 months as a way to help inform plans for the year ahead.

Looking back at 2010 for TCIA:

- Membership totals stopped declining. We recruited 288 new members in 2010, the highest number in a decade. Overall membership could have been stronger, but new members were offset by companies experiencing financial pressure that didn't renew.

- The Certified Treecare Safety Program took off and continues to pick up momentum. We celebrated the 500th CTSP early in the year and kept roaring forward, passing 600 before year end. That's 600 trainers who can go back to their companies to improve the culture of safety in their organizations.
- For the third consecutive year, TCIA's accident survey results demonstrated that employees working for TCIA member companies are less likely to be injured on the job, and that employees who work for TCIA member companies that are accredited and have a CTSP on staff are safer still.
- TCIA jumped into the social media pool headfirst this year, with podcasts of past TCI EXPO education sessions, and new episodes of the Tchukki Channel on treecaretips.org, starring our staff arborist Tchukki Andersen. We held our first Tweetup at TCI EXPO; doubled, tripled or quadrupled traffic at TCIA sites on LinkedIn, Facebook and Flickr; produced a Profile Series video with Louis Gossett Jr., that aired on hundreds of TV stations, including the Discovery Channel.
- We developed a series of "How To" videos on tree care geared to the consumer that can be seen on MonkeySee.com; and, finally, continued to offer tremendous Webinars, viewed easily and cheaply, on the topics of safety, business management, and loss control.
- In 2010, we started to see Accreditation written into the RFPs for government contracts. We worked with municipalities and landscape architects to push Accreditation as a requirement into more and more RFP's for the future.
- We found a great new city for TCI EXPO, Pittsburgh, where discounts on education were offered to members for the first time.
- The 14th Annual Student Career Days wrapped up another successful experience this year, with students representing 18 colleges and universities from across the country.
- In 2010, we introduced new and updated products to help companies run their businesses more profitably and safely, including the IPM Guide for Insects and Mites, "Illness & Injury Prevention Program," a Spanish version of Tree Climber Specialist and an all-new Tree Care Safety Specialist in English and Spanish, as well as a dozen free checklists, booklets and business forms.
- The Voice for Trees Political Action Committee dinner and auction in Hawaii attracted almost 100, our highest number ever, who bid heartily knowing that the proceeds would further their business interests in Washington.
- We took the first steps toward defining what exactly are sustainable plant health care practices. In addition to ongoing cooperation with green industry groups such as ISA, PLANET, ASCA and ASLA, in 2010 we worked in cooperation with the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition, Greenscape Business Alliance, International Code Council, Urban and Community Wood Marketing Collaborative, and the Sustainable Sites Initiative
- Through TCIA's foundation, loss control experts have travelled the country making on-site visits to member companies. A safer, more profitable industry will result from what we are learning on each visit.
- OSHA decided not to pursue a separate arborist standard in 2010, shifting emphasis away from compliance assistance toward enforcement and fines.

Despite the lack of movement on our own federal standard, OSHA rulemaking affecting arborists was very active. TCIA was heavily engaged in proposed rules on Injury and Illness Prevention Programs, a Hearing Conservation Standard, recordkeeping proposals on ergonomic injuries, revisions to the Walking-Working Surfaces and Personal Protective Equipment standards, and an Electric Power Transmission and Distribution Rule.

- At the state level, after a lot of work, I am very pleased to announce here this morning that Virginia will have a brand new standard for safe arboriculture practice. Our Virginia members and Peter Gerstenberger helped Virginia write a model standard, largely based on Z133, that could serve as a model for other states. Maryland is now seeking our assistance in writing a standard for tree care.
- TCIA weighed in on legislative and regulatory issues in 2010 in California, Indiana, New York, Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, Michigan, Massachusetts, Minnesota and British Columbia.
- In addition to regulations, TCIA's lobbyists and staff worked on federal legislation covering the Small Business Access to Credit Act, Biomass Crop Assistance Program, Protecting America's Workers Act, Employee Free Choice Act, Miner Safety and Health Act, Green Communities Act, Small Business Environmental Stewardship Assistance Act, Small Business Tree Planting Program, Green Infrastructure for Clean Water Act, and a House Resolution for Streetscaping – among other pieces of legislation.
- TCIA was fortunate to continue to enjoy successful partnerships with our Associate Members – from sponsorships, to advertising, to support for government affairs, safety and best business management practices. We could not offer the quality of programs you expect without their assistance. Our Associate Members continued to value their relationships with TCIA and its members by increasing their commitments in 2010.
- Last year, Tree Care Industry Magazine celebrated its 20th birthday by rolling out a new, interactive digital magazine.

Those were just some of the highlights from 2010. The list could have been much longer, as your association's staff works each day to advance your tree care business. By necessity, a state of the association presentation looks backward to what we accomplished. Now, I'd like to look ahead at the challenges we face in 2011 and beyond. Last year, as those of you who were in Hawaii remember well, we investigated and debated unification with PLANET – ultimately deciding not to proceed. While unification talks are not on the agenda in 2011, many of the challenges that prompted those talks remain in front of us – for the industry and for TCIA as your trade association. What are those challenges?

Our industry's faces competition from un-professional practitioners, as the economy and decline in manufacturing jobs has attracted unprecedented numbers of low-skilled, low-priced competitors into our field.

We face challenges in the larger business environment, with increased regulation, higher taxes, rising energy and soaring health care costs, coupled with reduced discretionary income for our customers.

We face challenges in our message to the public, convincing consumers of the environmental benefits of quality tree work.

We face challenges attracting, training and retaining a dedicated workforce of legal employees. It has been a little easier during the recession, but the long-term shortage isn't going away.

We face challenges adapting to our customers, as baby boomers retire to lower incomes. Our future customers, the Gen X'ers, have very different buying habits. Printed Yellow Pages ads won't attract much business from the under 40 crowd. How do you reach them and what prompts them to buy?

We face challenges defining green for arboriculture. Where do we fit in the green industry, in the green movement, in the advancement of a sustainable environment? What role do we play as eco-system managers – and where in this vast and complex arena do we stand or fall in defending our services in disease and pest management?

And finally, we continue to face challenges in making sure employees return home safely each evening.

TCIA will tackle those issues on your behalf, with your help.

As an association TCIA faces its own internal challenges. Like many of you, we can save, and cut, and improve efficiency and find new ways to serve our members without raising prices. Eventually, we need to grow again.

In 2011, as an association, we need to:

- Grow the membership of TCIA, as baby boomer owners retire. The industry is changing and consolidating, with many current members being replaced by new companies and inexperienced people, many of whom don't speak English as their first language.
- Attract the next generation of company owners without alienating the present generation of committed members.
- Examine our market penetration. For at least the past 15 years that I have been associated with TCIA, only 10 percent of the industry has been members of TCIA. Why?
- Increase retention rates through the continuous development of tangible member benefits. As in your business, retaining loyal members is preferable to constantly chasing new ones.
- Diversify our revenue streams to include more grant funding.

- Justify to our Associate Members that their dues, advertising and sponsorship bring a return in increased business.
- Mobilize our volunteers and justify their investment of their time in our association.
- Decrease operating costs per member.
- Find a home in TCIA for all sizes of members.
- Discover new ways to facilitate networking, which members continue to value, for those who don't come to Winter Management Conference.
- Keep up with technology and with all of the new communications avenues our members, non-members and your potential customers use.
- Fund a more proactive approach to inform the media about our industry and the quality companies that improve their environment.
- Reach out to purchasers of tree care services and outside groups of landscape architects, city planners, building owners, municipalities and many, many others.
- Secure professional talent to run the association.

Those are some of our challenges. We do not look at them with trepidation or dread. Challenges present opportunities, and your association's staff is excited to tackle them because we know that we have a dedicated, loyal membership facing them with us together. The last few years have been a struggle, and we could not have emerged without the support of the members.

So I would like to thank all of our members and your board of directors for your continued faith in the mission of TCIA. The association exists to serve your interests and we cannot fulfill it without you. So thank you, and I hope you have a great 2011.