

The objectives of competitive tree climbing



Connecticut Tree Climbing Competition

Fulton Park, Cooke St., Waterbury. Sat., April 10, 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free. (203) 484-2512, www.CTPA.org

At the sixth annual Connecticut Tree Climbing Competition, 25 of the state's most experienced arborists will compete in an obstacle course 60 feet above ground. Winners of the contest, which happens April 10 in Waterbury's Fulton Park, will qualify to climb to the top of the ISA New England Tree Competition in June.

"The emphasis of the competition is to demonstrate safety as well as skill," says Chris Donnelly, president of the Northford-based Connecticut Tree Protective Association, which is sponsoring the event.

"Statistically, there are more tree-related accidents than you might think," says CTPA Chairman and Head Judge Charlie Iselin. "Serious injuries can be sustained far up. It can take a long time for emergency crews to rescue the victim." Iselin encourages homeowners to use professional assistance with tree maintenance. Arborists, he continues, are trained to conserve and remove trees responsibly.

"We try to have our competition throughout the state because there are so many tree care providers throughout Connecticut," says Donnelly. Last year's event took place at Beardsley

Park in Bridgeport. In past years, arborists have converged in parks in greater New Haven.

Eligible climbers must be experienced. Competitors will maximize their strength and creativity in five simultaneous events, including the Secured Foot Lock, Throw Line Accuracy, Belayed Speed Climb, Work Climb and Aerial Rescue. Each event is timed. Men and women compete separately. One of the CTPA's goals is to encourage women participants.

"The Secured Foot Lock is an ascent of up to 50 feet," says Iselin. For Throw Line Accuracy, climbers must secure three different lines of rope in specified parts of the tree. The Belayed Speed Climb is similar to the Secured Foot Lock, except climbers can scale heights of up to 60 feet. For Aerial Rescue, competitors must rescue a dummy placed high in the tree's branches.

The competition's most complex event is the Work Climb. Competitors must move down a tree completing various tasks, including hitting strategically placed cowbells and balancing weights placed at the ends of limbs. Points are lost if the weights fall. Finally, climbers must land squarely on a target mat. The smoother the climber lands, the greater their number of points.

Winners compete in the Master's Challenge, the botanical equivalent of a grand finale. The potentially tie-breaking climb combines aspects of each prior event.

In addition to the opportunity to advance in regional competition, winners receive new tree gear, including ropes and saws. Sponsors from industry manufacturers provide the prizes. Donnelly says the event is still open to potential climbers and sponsors.