

Leadership Highlight

This new series highlights the everyday leaders in our industry — people who are progressing the green industry in their own ways. Whether through leading a business, a division, or sharing their strengths through volunteer work, it all moves the industry forward.

In this issue **Michele Robeson-Howard, Owner, Robeson Farms**, took time out to answer our leadership questions. Robeson Farms is a wholesale balled and burlapped tree production company in Flora, Indiana.

How did you get started in the green industry? I used to work for another nursery, and my family owns a lot of farmland. I decided it would be smart for me to use the land, take what I had learned, expand the idea, and create my own business.

What have been some of the challenges you have faced?

Oh my gosh, I had a huge learning curve. I had done the work for years, but had to learn the whole business side — buying trees, selling them, and creat a marketing strategy. But I would say the biggest challenge has always been that fickle mistress, Mother Nature. Five or six years ago a 100 year flood nearly wiped out everything. It was tough to recover from that. This year the early spring heat blast created a perfect environment for fungi, then we had to water like crazy because of the drought, and even then, the heat was hard on everything. The insect populations are always a challenge, and different every year.

What helped you in addressing these challenges?

I overcame challenges in two ways. Number one, being a woman, I'm not afraid to ask for directions. My dad has been my constant advisor in everything from making spray pumps work to the logistics of shipping. Bill Dison has been my mentor in all questions related to digging. But when addressing the issues from fickle Mother Nature, I consult the Internet. The Internet is a rich source of everything related to bugs or diseases. Simply google what you need and you'll get every report from Ohio State Extension, Purdue State Extension, Missouri State Extension, and dozens more. You can even find videos of the ailment on YouTube. If you need a chemical label to figure out the application rate, it's all there. I keep saying, kids these days don't know how easy they have it. Back in the day (not to betray my age) we used to have to pour through big thick books in the dim hope of finding the bug or disease you're looking for, then, consulting another book to try to figure out what chemical to spray, then call the manufacturer to see if you can get a label to see if it's something you can even use on trees. Not any more! Google! And it's free!

What has helped you progress your business? Of course, the constant support from my dad means so much. We make a good team. But the business would not exist without my persistent marketing efforts.

Do you have a Green Industry issue that interests you?

I guess I'd like to see an organized and renewed effort toward "nurturing our audience." I'd like to see renewed marketing efforts directed toward the end consumer (homeowner) educating them and convincing them that great landscaping will add value to their property and neighborhood. So many homeowners put a gob of money in the purchase of their home, and the landscaping efforts tend to be shoved aside. There are too many bleak and barren neighborhoods with a sea of large houses and only a few spindly trees. The homeowner needs to be convinced that adding an attractive landscape (with lots of B&B trees) is a smart investment.

What sustains your interest out of work?

I play trumpet professionally, and freelance for church services, special concert series, and weddings. I also compose and arrange music. Some of it is published. Music is so totally different from the work I do with the nursery that it allows me to escape on the weekends and recharge.



Movers Shakers

Listed are INLA members, their employees, or their organizations who have achieved recognition, special acknowledgments, an award, or a new position.

Submit your news to Donna Sheets at dsheets@inla1.org or by fax at 317-889-3935.

Wes Moore, 2012 Indiana Tree Climbing Competition Winner

The new tree climbing champion for the Indiana Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture is Wes Moore of Muncie, employed by Gillette-Duling Tree and Landscape. Wes competed against the other finalists, based on preliminary event scoring, Jeff Clark and John Montgomery in the Masters Challenge to become the 2012 Indiana Champion. Wes has been employed as an arborist in Indianapolis and Muncie for several years and revealed his abilities quite well in every event. As the Indiana champion, he will be representing the chapter at the International Tree Climbing Competition in Toronto in 2013.

Chilly, challenging, and exciting would describe the annual tree climbing competition on Saturday, September 22. Over 25 volunteers, dozens of spectators, friends and families endured a brisk first day of fall in Squirrel Park on the Purdue University campus. The day started at 38 degrees with fog and drizzle, giving way to partly sunny skies, a high of 55 degrees, accompanied by 25 mph gusts of wind, which made the events even more demanding. However, with 17 entries from 7 states, a new Indiana champion came through with an excellent display of climbing skills!