**2025 STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION**

Introduction

Good morning, everyone.

It is an absolute privilege to stand before you today and welcome you to our Annual Membership Meeting. To our members, staff, and the Board of Directors, thank you for your dedication and contributions over the past year. Together, you have propelled the Tree Care Industry Association forward in ways that exemplify our shared commitment to advancing this incredible industry.

Vision Anecdote

At TCIA, our mission has always been clear: to advance tree care businesses. But our mission is only meaningful if it translates in value for you, our members. Which is why the 6 Domains of Successful Tree Care Companies – Safety, Workforce Development, Advocacy & Compliance, Training, Sales & Marketing, and Business Strategy – now serve as the foundation of everything we do.

I’d like to share with you a quick story about the impact of just one of the ways we have modernized and increased the value of TCIA’s offerings. I recently had the opportunity to speak with the owner of one of our member companies. He shared with me how challenging it can be to offer training to his Spanish-speaking workforce. He explained that many of these hardworking individuals may not have completed the equivalent of elementary school, meaning that they may not be very literate even in their native language. That means that written training materials, like the manuals TCIA used to offer exclusively, are all but worthless to his company, no matter what language they are printed in.

I was thrilled to have the opportunity to talk to this business owner about TCIA’s online learning management platform and how, as a TCIA member, he was eligible to receive a training hub to access that system. I explained that by using a “tell, show, do” model, our new training programs were far more dynamic and hands-on than the old gray workbooks. I also shared that the platform not only features video content, but it also can read text aloud, both in the instruction and in the subsequent exams. Employees can now learn, see, and demonstrate skills no matter their level of literacy in either English or Spanish. We’re very excited to be getting this member company started on the path to more formally training their entire workforce.

This example demonstrates not only how far we have come in a very short period of time, but also the true value of TCIA membership in terms of continuing to advance your tree care business and promoting safety across the industry as a whole.

FY24 Accomplishments

As you can see from the Annual Report that you have received, we accomplished a great many things over the previous fiscal year, and I would like to highlight just a few things for you:

We finished fiscal year 2024 in a very strong financial position. Like many organizations, TCIA faced headwinds after the pandemic, particularly as the cost of things like paper for TCI Magazine and food and beverage at TCI EXPO and Winter Management skyrocketed. I am pleased to inform you that we finished the last fiscal year with close to $400,000 in Net Income from Operations, allowing us to continue to reinvest in TCIA’s valuable products and services.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight the care, diligence, and oversight with which TCIA’s finances are managed. We are keenly aware that we are guardians of the resources that you have all contributed to the support of our mission. We take seriously the fiduciary obligation to manage those assets well. TCIA and TCIA Foundation are independently audited on an annual basis by the accounting firm BerryDunn. Over the last six years, TCIA’s audits have always come back with a strong assurance that our reporting is accurate and identified only one area for improvement. Why does this matter to you? It highlights that the staff, Finance Committee, and Board of Directors have been, and will continue to be, remarkable stewards of TCIA’s resources.

Speaking of stewardship, I am also truly proud of the continued development and success of TCI EXPO. Three of the last four trade shows, including our 2023 event in St. Louis, our first west of the Mississippi, have set attendance records. We continue to innovate, adding new opportunities for exhibitors to connect with attendees while also expanding upon our education and networking offerings. As Carolanne of Robotec shared about her recent TCI EXPO experience, “this year’s TCI event […] was an outstanding success and our most impactful show of the year so far. The energy and engagement from attendees were exceptional, with insightful questions and meaningful interactions throughout.” While there are numerous options for trade shows each year, there is simply no replacement for attending TCI EXPO each year. I hope everyone here will join us this fall when we return to St. Louis!

In addition to our finances and our major events, TCIA’s membership remains strong. We finished calendar year 2024 with 1,370 tree care companies as members. This was admittedly a down year for us, landing us eighty members behind our 10-year average. Over that same period, TCIA has averaged 340 non-renewals from one year to the next, meaning that we must recruit 340 new members each year before we can truly grow membership. While some churn is common in trade associations, we have seen an increase in non-renewals post-pandemic driven by higher expenses for tree care companies and continued mergers and acquisitions across the industry. TCIA continues to allocate resources to the recruitment, engagement, and retention of tree care company members, while also acknowledging and adapting to economic realities that present new challenges and opportunities.

How will we continue to enhance the value of TCIA membership? In 2023 the Board of Directors worked with staff to identify a series of “game changers” that we believed would continue to advance our members and TCIA itself. The first of those initiatives which we began rolling out last year was to pivot to a consultative engagement approach. What that means in practice is exactly what I described in my opening anecdote – we work with you to identify aspects of your business where we can be of the greatest assistance. We have even launched a self-assessment tool that will help identify your strengths and needs. This tool also allows the Membership Engagement Team to collaborate more closely with each member company to understand their specific needs and develop tailored success plans. The overall approach includes quarterly check-ins to track progress, ensures benefit and resource utilization, and adjusts strategies to maximize member success.

Our second game changer, which we also launched last year, helps us more easily connect you with the resources most valuable to your company. Based on information gathered over the last twenty years of the TCIA Accreditation program, we have identified six key areas in which tree care companies must invest to succeed. Called the “6 Domains,” they are Safety, Work Force Development, Advocacy & Compliance, Training, Business Strategy, and Sales & Marketing. Over the next few days, we will be digging deeper into each Domain, but this morning I would like to share a few recent highlights for each:

* Safety – last year we passed 3,000 Certified Treecare Safety Professionals, a major milestone in terms of creating a culture of safety throughout the industry. As Bill Miller of Buckley Tree Service shared, “I really see a difference in our employees that have become CTSPs; they certainly became more involved in the creation, implementation, and adherence to our safety policies […]; I think the program helps develop a culture of safe thinking and that helps me sleep at night.”
* Work Force Development – keeping the industry’s workforce safe is critical, but we also know you need support in recruiting and retaining employees. Thanks to Husqvarna’s sponsorship, we are continuing to expand on the Registered Apprenticeship Program, a tool that helps companies explain a defined career pathway for applicants. We’re also excited about the sponsorships of the Women In Tree Care program we received from SavATree and Tree Care Marketing Solutions, allowing us to continue to promote an underrepresented segment of the labor force;
* Advocacy & Compliance – we continue to push for a separate industry standard at OSHA while also fighting back against a totally unworkable heat prevention regulation. We launched our “Professionalism in Tree Care” program, designed to assist the recipients of Inflation Reduction Act funding for tree planting and care hire knowledgeable and professional tree care companies to perform that work;
* Training – 215 member companies have created custom training hubs – taking advantage of this exclusive member benefit - while, in the last year alone, we have issued 31,815 ISA and 24,885 CTSP CEU’s through our learning management platform;
* Sales & Marketing – we continue to provide excellent content to help you develop your sales and marketing programs. If you have not yet participated in our free member webinars, like the “Plan to Succeed in PHC” and “A300 Update,” you can still access them on our website. All our monthly webinars, organized by the six domains, are archived as free resources for members.
* Business Strategy – what better way is there for you to work on your business than to be here with your peers at the Winter Management Conference!

As you can see, the “6 Domains” helps TCIA members quickly access the programs of greatest value to their business.

Where Are We Going?

We certainly accomplished a lot at TCIA last year, but there is always more work to be done. For example, TCIA will continue to expand our advocacy capabilities over the coming year. The reconstituted Public Policy Committee recently forwarded its policy recommendations to the Board of Directors. We are also looking at how we can expand our professional lobbying resources while finding more ways for you to get involved at the grassroots level. As someone who spent the first half of his career working on public policy I can tell you that you, as owners, employers, and seasoned arborists are the single greatest advocates we have as an industry.

Much like TCI EXPO, we are also innovating the way we create and deliver the content that keeps you informed and entertained. There is no doubt that TCI Magazine is the gold standard in terms of industry publications. And our recently re-launched member newsletter, Evergreen, keeps you up to date on TCIA’s important work. But we are long-overdue to expand into new media channels, something we look to achieve in the coming years.

Another of the game changers we’ve just started to work on involves our amazing members who manufacture and supply the tools, platforms, and services you need to be successful. While TCIA does a fantastic job connecting both groups of members, we also recognize that our corporate members are also often in contact with non-TCIA member tree care companies. We certainly appreciate those of you who encourage your customers to join TCIA, but we also realize we need to do more to support and recognize those efforts. I look forward to working with the newly formed Corporate Member Committee on this important project – after all, when tree care companies succeed, we all succeed.

Our plans for enhanced partnerships do not end there. We are fortunate today to be joined by representatives from the ISA, TREE Fund, and the Utility Arborist Association. Our partnerships with these organizations both recognize the overlapping nature of our memberships and the unique value each organization provides. We are also looking to expand our partnerships with non-profits and education institutions, other trade associations like the National Association of Landscape Professionals, and other tree care related organizations. I am proud to announce that we recently signed a partnership agreement with the ISA Southern Chapter, providing a model for how TCIA and the ISA chapters can support each other and our members. As I said before, a strong and thriving tree care industry benefits us all and I am excited to continue working collaboratively with these organizations towards that goal.

How Will We Get There?
So, now we know where we have been and we know where we are going, but how will we get there? First, we will be sitting down with many of you soon to explain some upcoming changes to our dues structure. Before you run for the exits, let me assure you that no one should be worried that their company's dues are about to spike. There are, however, real challenges that we need to prepare TCIA to face. TCIA will turn 87 in 2025 and now is the time to take steps to ensure that it is here for another 90-plus years.

We are also fortunate to have an amazing group of volunteers that donate their time and talent towards seeing TCIA achieve its goals. Many of you in this room have made those contributions over the years and continue to encourage the next generation of company leaders to do the same. For that, we are all incredibly thankful. I want to also take this opportunity to personally thank outgoing Board chair August Hoppe. August, the last eighteen months, has been, well, entertaining to say the very least. Your passion for this industry and your willingness to take on the tough fights are without comparison. You’re also the first Board chair I’ve worked with that’s my age, which I hope says more about you being a young chair and not about the age I’m turning later this week. All joking aside, August, I have truly benefited from working with you as Board chair and every member of TCIA owes you their thanks for the amazing job you have done.

In addition to the wonderful volunteers, we are also lucky to have an amazing staff. Our team is so proud to be supporting every business represented today and throughout our membership. They take seriously their part in ensuring that your employees go back to their families each night. They get excited to see your business succeed, even though that does not directly impact their lives in any way. This year a record 78% of our employees stated that they were likely or very likely to recommend employment at TCIA to their friends and relatives. I am proud of the team, and of the culture that we have built to support you and ask that you take every opportunity to thank this amazing group of people who serve you every day.

I’d also like to take a moment to recognize and thank our annual sponsors, and our sponsors here at WMC – your contributions allow us to create, manage and maintain our many industry initiatives, and we greatly value your partnership and continued support.

Conclusion

Finally, someone recently asked me, “what will the tree care industry look like in 10 years?” Because I cannot help myself, I took a stab at answering. But as I thought more, I realized something – the very best people to answer that question are all sitting here in this room today. Some of you have been coming to this conference for decades and others may be here for the first time, but you are all part of establishing the future of this amazing industry. So, as you spend the next several days together ask each other that simple question – what will the tree care industry look like in 10 years – you’ll likely learn a lot from what you hear!

Thank you all for the opportunity to be here with you and to continue to be of service to you and your companies. I wish you all the very best as you work to continue to advance your tree care business.