

*Article by Jim Skiera, ISA Executive Director*

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Imagine a major metropolitan city with a population of more than 7 million people, supporting an urban forest canopy cover exceeding 65 percent. Each of the 450,000 publicly owned urban trees receives an annual risk assessment, and the majority of these trees are identified with visible tags indicating they have been inspected and/or have been recognized as trees of significance by the local government. To most municipal arborists and urban foresters this might sound like nirvana; but in Hong Kong, this is a reality. I recently visited Hong Kong with ISA Board members Dr. Zhu Ning and Dr. Francesco Ferrini and ISA staff members Sharon Lilly and Marya Ryan to meet with members of our affiliate, the ISA Hong Kong HK/China Station. Also present were Dr. Ed Gilman and ISA Past Presidents Lauren Lanphear and Gary Watson, who were also featured speakers at the International Arboriculture Summit Hong Kong (IASHK), hosted by Asia Tree Preservation (ATP) and the ISA HK/China Station. This is the fourth summit in as many years, thanks primarily to the efforts of ATP President and hyperactive ISA member, Don Picker.

Following the 2007 ISA conference in Hawaii, Station Manager Sammy Au applied to the ISA Board of Directors to become one of ISA's first associate organizations in Asia. Since that time, Sammy and his team have built this organization to support a rapidly expanding HK arboricultural industry. Since 2007, the ISA Certified Arborist program has certified more than 500 people in the region. The Hong Kong credential holders have built a strong relationship with fellow ISA associate organization, the Singapore Arborist Association, to spread the benefits of our certification program in this area of the world. The ISA HK/China Station currently boasts a membership of 1,800+ and includes an excess of 250 ISA professional members. The station holds the record for the largest ISA Certified Arborist examination ever held, with 199 people seated at one exam. The station also has a very active tree climbing membership through Tree Climbing Hong Kong (TCHK) with about 400 members. Not a bad five year run.

During our 2011 visit, we met with many local government officials. It was inspiring to hear of their interest in not only the urban forest, but also in training people to improve tree care practices and public safety in Hong Kong. They recognize the ISA Certified Arborist credential as one of the credentials required of professionals for working on governmental contracts. They have also been very active with tree risk assessment training through the ISA Pacific Northwest (PNW) Tree Risk Assessment training course, which is in process to be transitioned into an international ISA program.

I was fortunate enough to attend the ISA HK TCHK Tree Climbing Championship. This was the first time this event was conducted under the official ISA International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC) rules. Thirty-seven competitors, including four women and a number of guest climbers and judges from Singapore, the U.S., and Australia, participated. In the HKTCC committee organizers Tony-Chi Hung Ng and LI Kwok man with support from visiting former competitor Brian French (ISA PNW), put on a first-rate competition. I have attended many local climbing events in my 23+ years with ISA, and I can tell you this was one of the best runs I have encountered.

I spoke with Brian about this, and he explained to me how it all came together. ISA HK sent a team of members to the ISA ITCC in Parramatta, NSW, Australia. The team videotaped each of the events in detail for future study. When they returned, they sat down with the local arrangements committee and debriefed on each of the events, much like a football coach reviews game tapes in preparation for the Super Bowl. It was clear they did not let the language barrier (Cantonese) stop them from putting on a safe and engaging event.

The winners of the event are very excited about participating in the ITCC this August in Portland, Oregon, and plans are underway for the station to host the Asia-Pacific Tree Climbing Championship in 2013.

I am proud to announce that during the visit, local ISA members decided to develop a plan to make the station a full-service chapter of ISA. Sammy Au and I met with a number of prominent members in Hong Kong and formed a steering committee to guide the process. Founding members of the ISA Hong Kong Chapter Steering Committee are as follows: Ho, Kin Chuen John (chair); Wong, Chiky (co-chair); So, Kwok Yin Ken (co-chair); Leung, WK Mike (co-chair); Jonathan Picker (co-chair); Chan, H K Jack (secretary); J. Ian Robinson (treasurer); Dr. Chau Kam Chiu Lawrence; Ng, Tze Kwun Kathy; Lai, Ming Yiu Eduardo; Au, Wing Sum Sammy; Lo, Shun Cheong; Lam Kong Hing.

The Steering Committee is charged with developing an action plan with milestones on key activities, such as the creation of the bylaws, constitution, and other operational committees. The committee will design a website to communicate with other ISA members and collect their views and suggestions through the process. ISA President-elect Terry Flanagan attended this meeting and provided support to this team for their efforts.

The following members were approved and added by the Steering Committee at the first meeting on December 9, 2011: Lai, Chuen Chi Patrick; Choi, Lim Cho Kinglsey; Choi So Man.

The ISA Board applauds the efforts of our members in Hong Kong, and pledges further assistance to the Steering Committee so that their dream becomes a reality. We wish them all our best and thank them for helping us make the world a better place, one tree at a time.