

## Asia's First ITCC Winning Female Arborist

AWARDEES' CORNER - 1

Kay CHEUNG

I recently competed in the 2018 International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC) in Columbus, Ohio, the United States, as a member of the Hong Kong team. I had a great experience and am proud to share this experience with members of the ISA Hong Kong Chapter.

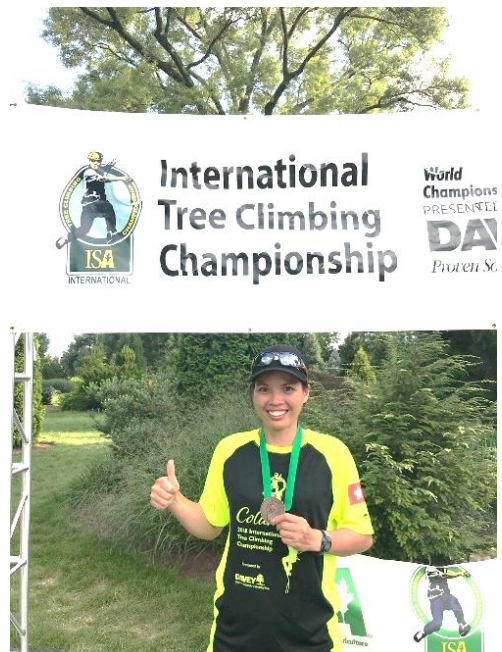
The announcer just finished presenting the awards for another event, turned to us in the crowd and yelled out: "...in the biggest event, it is time to start announcing the Work Climb results!!"

"Are you ready?"

"I can't hear you! Are you ready!!??"

"In the Women's Individual, the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, winner is from the Hong Kong Chapter, Hoi Kei Kay Cheung!"

When I heard 'Hong Kong Chapter...' I was unexpected and surprised. I wanted to scream out loud!! I don't even recall hearing my name called as I was still surprised and happy that I won the 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Prior to this, there has never been a female climber from Hong Kong on the stage to get a medal, and I felt so proud of myself and the Hong Kong Chapter. I think the other competitors should feel proud for Hong Kong as they also clapped and yelled really loud. The feeling was even better because my friends, teammate, and family was there to share this moment with me. I had been competing for several years and this was my proudest moment!



The 2018 international tree climbing championships was held at beautiful Franklin Park in Columbus Ohio, U.S. from Thursday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> till Sunday, August 5<sup>th</sup>. The equipment check-in and event walkthrough took place on Thursday and it was great to see the other competitors from all over the world. As this was my 3<sup>rd</sup> time competing in the ITCC with the Hong Kong team, the other competitors and I had become well-acquainted with each other. There was a total of 75 competitors from over 24 countries, including 26 women and 49 men. Friday and Saturday were the ITCC Masters' Qualifying events with award ceremony taking place at the park on Saturday afternoon after completion of all events.

The last day, Sunday, was the Masters' Challenge event with only top 5 men and usually the top 3 women competitors qualified, however this year they made an exception that a total of 4 top women competitors were accepted. I learned on late Saturday that in addition to placing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the preliminary round, my final score allowed me taking a 5<sup>th</sup> place overall.

There were five overall events and all of the climbers and the volunteers were busy focusing on each event. Competitors wanted to perform smoothly and the volunteers want to ensure the event goes smoothly. We all knew the event with the highest score is the Work Climb so this was the single event that all competitors tried to really do their best and earned the most points possible. Prior to starting the Work Climb, I arrived at the site a bit early to get ready, calm myself down, and think about my goal of finishing all of the stations and reaching the ground before the allowed time. I watched a few competitors to learn the best route to each station, how to go back and forth, and then how to make a beautiful landing - all allowed within the 5 minutes. When it was almost my turn, I went up the tree, took a deep breath, adjusted my mind, and

again went through every station in my head. When it was finally my turn, my teammate Pau gave me a thumbs up and that gave me much confidence. 'I will do my best!' I said to myself. The judge said "when ready just press the horn and go!" Once I started, the 5 minutes went like a flash and each station was a bit rush for me, swinging widely from branch to branch and during the long limb walk. Throughout the entire event I was focused but still heard the crowd cheering me up. I had just completed the last station when I heard my husband Colin and teammate Pau yelled out "only 20 seconds", then "15 seconds", and finally "10 seconds, hurry Kay!" OMG, I knew I had to hurry and due to the rush, I didn't land on the designated point on the ground, but I really didn't care as my only thought was to unclip my carabiner. As I landed I noticed all timers were really focused on me and the time - then finally I managed to unclip my carabiner and yelled out "Done!!".

I was very exhausted and asked one of judges about my time and he simply said "1 second". I was very disappointed and upset that I was 1 second overtime. After a few seconds though I told myself to be happy as I did my best and that was my goal. The judge saw my face and said to me "hey you finished under 5 minutes, with only 1 second remaining". I was so overjoyed and happy!! At this point I had no idea that by the end of the day only a few females overall were able to complete all of the stations within 5 minutes or that I would get 3<sup>rd</sup> place overall. This was why I was so surprised when I heard "From the Hong Kong Chapter..." later that day.

In addition to the competition events there were other activities at the site like the Arbor Fair and Expo. This was very well-organized and as you entered the area you felt like you were in a shopping street with a lot of tree gear manufacturers showing and selling many products. I felt cool to walk around see equipment and other tree climbing gear for sale. At the same time, though, you needed to spend some money as the gear was in high quality with special price. For most of us this was a unique experience, so it was worth spending the money to get tools you need. Also if you have any questions about the tools, there was always someone ready to give you great answers. In overall the competition and my weekend both were great

and I look forward to competing and representing Hong Kong in the ITCC for more many years.

