

# Arborist Exchange to Slovenia, Land of Trees and Dragons

by Lisa Olson, Director of Urban Forestry, Cheyenne, Wyoming



Lena Marion (left) and author Lisa Olson in the town of Piran on the Slovenian coast.

**Zdravo!** (Hello!) Last year, the SMA Arborist Exchange program sent me to Slovenia, a small country of two million people who have a passion for their trees. Massive heritage trees—and statues of mystical dragons, central to Slovenian folklore—can be found around every corner.

I was hosted by arborist Lena Marion, who completed her doctorate in Forestry last year at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Lena heads one of the departments in the professional arborist company called TISA d.o.o. She speaks English very well—thank goodness—and she served as my interpreter as well as my host. Lena then came and stayed with me in Wyoming (report to come in the next issue of *City Trees*).

The Slovenian communities we visited had state foresters, concerned professionals from the private sector, nature conservatory agencies, and volunteers handling urban forestry—not city foresters or municipal arborists. In Ljubljana, the capitol of Slovenia, the City hires private companies to work on its trees. Until two years ago, the City did not have a long-term tree management plan for private companies to work from. The City also does not require qualifications for arborists who bid on Ljubljana's tree maintenance contracts. Therefore, during one contract period, the City might hire a professional company that knows how to correctly maintain their majestic trees, and the next contract period, a non-professional company that tops trees.

The concerned professionals I talked to need and want help to promote community forestry programs throughout Slovenia that promote industry standards and good practices. One step their communities can take to initiate these programs would be to establish local tree boards.

Slovenia has the same tree problems cities all over the world have, including damage to tree trunks and tree roots from the construction of buildings, roads, and sidewalks. Slovenian communities also need to make tough decisions about heritage trees that have become hazards. Without a designated person in charge of caring for trees, this can be problematic.

Another challenge is that there is a lack of arboricultural information, a resource English-speaking arborists take for granted, published in the Slovenian language. It is a large task to translate arboriculture literature from English, making it difficult to educate the public about sound tree care and advance arboriculture as a profession. When Lena wanted to become an ISA Certified Arborist, she had to decide if she should take the test in English or German (the test is not given in Slovenian). Lena decided she knew more English than German and took the test at the ISA conference in St. Louis, Missouri. She is now the second ISA Certified Arborist in Slovenia, after Tanja Grmovšek, from Maribor.



Horsechestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) are common street trees in Slovenia.



The City of Celje's urban forests logo; Mestni gozd means "urban forest"

Lena and others have looked at options such as creating a Slovenian-speaking arboriculture organization that would advocate for the urban forests and educate the public. The group could write articles for local media outlets, create a Web site that answers tree questions, and host educational workshops for adults and children.

The tree professionals that I met in the three communities are taking on these challenges. To assist their efforts, they would love to have a Slovenian link to arborist organizations such as the SMA, ISA, and European Arboriculture Council. Having chapters in neighboring countries provides regional educational opportunities makes traveling possible but doesn't address the language barrier, so Slovenian chapters are needed.

Despite the lack of appointed city arborists, I was impressed at what groups of concerned citizens and tree professionals have accomplished. The tree professional volunteers in the Slovenian community of Celje convinced the City to acquire a mountainside next to town. After ten years of fundraising and purchasing



View over Celje, Slovenia



Near the center of Ljubljana, next to the Ljubljanica River, hazardous old weeping willow trees (*Salix x sepulcralis*) were removed and replanted.



Care is taken to protect this London planetree (*Platanus x hispanica*) on a median.



Thoughtless excavation of soil around this large-leaf linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*) in Ljubljana will come with fines now that there is a tree ordinance, passed in January 2009.

contiguous land parcels from various owners, the community now has a vast park in its backyard for adults and children to experience. The volunteers also have designed a recognizable tree logo "brand" so the public will connect this park to future efforts.

Volunteers review some of the site plans that are being designed and built to make sure trees are included. Other communities, such as Maribor, have added duties onto their horticulturist position to not only take care of the grass and flowers, but also the trees. That is a lot for one person, but it is a start, with the hope that an arborist position will eventually be created. This is a key time to act, as Ljubljana is creating a master plan for its city; part of that master plan must include tree care criteria.

I have traveled through many states and a few countries and one thing is for sure, Slovenians are very well educated and have a strong work ethic. On a personal note, everyone I met was extremely friendly, accommodating, and very patient with me even though I could not speak Slovenian. I enjoyed meeting so many tree people! I send a special thanks to Lena and her family for the hospitality and friendship that they showed me. There will always be a close bond between our families in the many years to come. Finally, thank you to SMA and the sponsors of the Arborist Exchange Program for making my exchange possible! 🍃



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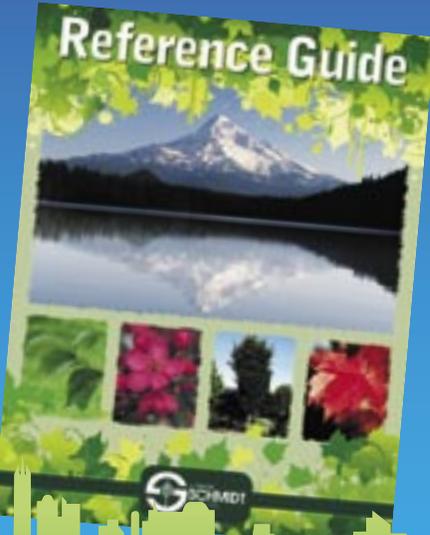


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