

ROUNDTABLE: Retired from the Municipality

In this roundtable we hear from colleagues who have retired from a municipality or from a state-level Urban and Community Forestry program position. This roundtable was compiled more than two months ago. Social distancing in the time of COVID-19 has no doubt put a pause on many of these happy pursuits. We hope you are all healthy and safe and able to resume your happy pursuits soon.

I retired as Chattanooga, Tennessee City Forester on January 31, 2020. Since then I have:

- slept in until 4:00 a.m. (Good);
- become the main 24/7 servant to my daughter's cat (Not Good);
- been bored out of my mind (Not Good);
- done more hill walking (Good); and
- remained at work part-time as a paid consultant (Good!)

—**Gene Hyde**



Shelley Vescio (right) with Forestry Futures Trust Committee colleague Anastasia Frisby on a forest genetics field tour.

After 21 years of public service, I left my position as City Forester with the City of Thunder Bay, Ontario in the fall of 2016. It was with a heavy heart that I left my urban forestry practice, but I found that the job had become too stressful; my family convinced me that it was in my—and their—best interest to find a new one. I needed a job where I could make most of the people happy most of the time ... and I found it.

I now work full-time as a Program Coordinator for the Forestry Futures Trust Committee, whose job it is to allocate funds from the Ontario Forestry Futures Trust. Generated through stumpage fees, these monies are applied to silviculture projects through a competitive application process. My job is to vet applications for the Committee and administratively manage those successful silviculture projects, along with others in forest genetics and forest inventory.

Having been out of traditional forestry for many years, this position presented a steep learning curve that I found to be both scary and exciting. I pretty much have it down now, though, and I really enjoy chatting with foresters from across the Province and hearing the passion and dedication they have for their work.

Now that I no longer work evenings and weekends, I have time to pursue other passions, such as sewing. I have studiously built up my stash of fabric and sewing gadgets and even bought two vintage Singer sewing machines that I plan to refurbish. I have no idea how I am going to do that, but I'm counting on Google to help me through it. I joined a gym that provides High-Intensity Interval Training workouts that I enjoy doing with my husband, I take weekly yoga classes, and I'm reading more fiction than I have in years. Now I'm just waiting for grandkids to come along. All in all, I'm healthy, happy, and loving life!

—**Shelley Vescio**



Ian “Mac” McDermott (center) at the Morton Arboretum with colleagues Rich Hauer (left) and Jake Miesbauer.

My retirement from full-time municipal tree management came in 2015 when I had to leave Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, partly due to ill health and partly due to my time there (10 years) having run its course. However, by then I was already working part-time in education and training and went straight from Walsall to Moulton College in Northamptonshire to teach on the Arboriculture degree as well as working with the urban forestry volunteers across the region to help with their training—something I have done throughout my entire career. This latter item has probably been the biggest joy since retirement but of course brings no income; fiscal requirement led me to other endeavors.

My passion for teaching started when I was at college, but I chose not to pursue teaching secondary (high school) education after a couple of semesters as it destroyed my will to live and so chose the land-based sector and ended up working for Sandwell (20 years) and Cannock Chase Councils (5 years) before landing for my last decade at Walsall. Whilst at Cannock I took my first part-time post teaching at Llysfasi College (it was then part of Bangor University) at

the weekends, which I guess re-ignited my desire to teach that had so cruelly been beaten out of me when I was younger!

After retirement I registered with Lantra as an instructor to teach their tree inspection courses which at the time complimented my TRAQ instructor’s role. The latter faltered, though, when ISA withdrew from the UK, but there was plenty of work as an instructor to keep me from enjoying any kind of relaxing retirement.

After two short sojourns at Birmingham Metropolitan College and Bournville College, I took on the role as Arboriculture course manager and lecturer at Pershore College, which is demanding enough. Any spare time is taken acting as a consultant on planning applications where trees are impacted. It’s the classic game-keeper-turned-poacher scenario, but I still work the odd days for a municipality and the Municipal Tree Officers’ Association (MTOA) to keep my morals and ethics in check! Next week? Who knows?

—Ian “Mac” McDermott

To paraphrase an old *Animal House* line, I’m currently enjoying “double secret” retirement! The “double” part is that I formally retired from Davey Resource Group in 2018, and this year I get to officially start drawing my retirement pension from the City of Cincinnati, Ohio, where I started my urban forestry career. The “secret” part is that I’m actually still working full time.

To me, retirement means doing what you love, when you want, and on your own terms. And since I love urban forestry and the community of professionals in it, what better way to spend my early retirement than to start my own consulting firm, which allows me to stay connected with old friends and make new ones.

My business partner, Rachel Comte, and I hung out the Urban Canopy Works, LLC shingle in the spring of 2018, and it’s been great. I’m still getting my boots muddy on construction sites, wearing my hardhat for tree risk assessments, yet dressing for success to conduct public meetings for urban forest master plans. Currently, I’m really excited to be under contract as the Distiller’s Arborist for a major distillery on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail to help them better manage the trees on their historic property.

Rest assured, I am making time for personal endeavors, goals, and projects. I got married three years ago, and my husband Bill and I bought a mid-century modern home/money pit in Union, Kentucky that we really enjoy restoring. I tried raising chickens, but that didn’t quite work out as I planned. I did adopt three stray kittens, upping my household feline population to five.

I go on road trips with my husband on his Harley, and through our travels we’ve joined five wine clubs, from California to Texas to Kentucky. I am also so looking forward to traveling to Chile this fall to celebrate a—let’s just say, significant—birthday. Seeing the Southern Cross constellation has been on my bucket list since college (and dang if I’m not getting closer to that bucket every year!)

I highly recommend the retired life to everyone, but if I can still be of any assistance to you my good friends, just give me a call. It will help me stay gainfully “retired”!

—Jenny Gulick



Jenny Gulick enjoying “retirement” with her husband Bill.



Paula Chope found Elvis on her travels.

I retired from the City of Dublin, Ohio on May 31, 2019 after working 30 years as City Forester. The first thing I did was to stay up late and sleep in! I volunteer as an usher and concessions person with the Columbus Association of Performing Arts (CAPA). Through that, I've had the opportunity to see great theater, dance, and other various art programs at CAPA's six venues in the area. Periodically, I volunteer at a catering company whose mission is to hire those coming off of the streets from prostitution or human trafficking and I work occasionally for a local catering company, serving at corporate and private events. I enjoy being at the party in my own way and getting to sample good food.

I also work part-time (12 hours/week) for a foliage and annual greenhouse, pulling orders for local florists, garden centers,

Kroger, and Costco. This has motivated me to brush up on my houseplant identification skills. I've been taking adult learning classes, such as one about bread making and another about how to take great pictures using my smart phone.

Last year I went to Maine to hike in Acadia National Park then to Italy on a mission trip. This year, I will go to Florida to visit family and hang out with a group of women friends and then to California to sight-see and hike. I've been purging and consolidating around the house during the winter. I have not worked in forestry other than to stop and talk with homeowners when I'm out walking. I did, however, print business cards to prune small trees and shrubs for those interested.

—Paula Chope

I retired in late 2016 from Sacramento after 11 years as the City's Urban Forester and 5 years as the City Arborist for Folsom, California. Like many of us, retirement came unexpectedly after a change in management and policy occurred that I was not aligned with. I wanted to stay involved and current, so I joined up with a colleague to help build capacity in his tree care business as a short-term endeavor and took on a few larger consulting clients, primarily in telecommunications. In Sacramento I rarely had the opportunity to work with individuals and get out on job sites. Now I had boots on the ground. Though completely comfortable as a consultant, I was, ironically, sorely out of practice in terms of quoting actual tree work. Go figure.

In late 2018 I was contacted by a consulting engineering firm that specialized in providing design, inspections, and construction management for public agencies. I met with management informally ("Hey, I'm retired! No formal interviews, OK?") They informed me about the scope of work, the need,

the hours and pay scale, but not about the client. A month or so came and went with no contact, and I had mostly forgotten about it when the call came. My new client was none other than the City of Folsom, where I cut my teeth on planning and development. I know the community, so I could hit the ground running. I work with fun, bright, thoughtful, and very talented thirty-somethings, reminding me that as my career is coming to a close, they represent the future work force. I feel very fortunate.

As a result of California State law changes regarding consulting services for local governments, I am now a "retired annuitant" for Folsom, which allows me to retain my pension with limited hours and to continue to be involved. In my free time I'm enjoying a return to yoga, a little bit of teaching, long weekends, and I finally have time and energy for my friends and family. My feet still hit the floor at 4:30 a.m., though. Working on that one ...

—Joe Benassini

"Hey, I'm retired! No formal interviews, OK?"

When I was working as the Superintendent of Parks and Trees for Wellesley, Massachusetts, I joined the SMA. Throughout my career I enjoyed writing articles about our success stories, including writing for *City Trees*, for which I was eventually appointed Editor. After 20 years in that role, I decided to leave my active involvement with the SMA as well as *City Trees*.

It was then that I started Online Seminars for Municipal Arborists. This website has evolved to become a resource for arborists and foresters to become more informed and to earn ISA CEUs. I also joined LinkedIn and started their Urban Forestry discussion group. Four years after starting the Seminars, I was contacted by Richard Gibney, an ISA Certified Arborist and owner of a landscape architecture firm who had a sideline of providing

education programs for LAs who needed credits for their registration renewals. We agreed to merge our programs, which took a big load off my shoulders.

Now I spend my time writing new articles for the quarterly Seminars and updating existing ones. I also annually review our typical specifications page and the article about how to prepare a street tree master plan. The updates also include the most popular feature on the website, the Arborist's Dictionary. I plan to continue this effort for as long as I am able. Through this and other means, I am trying to do my part to help arborists and landscape architects better understand each other and work together in harmony. I also enjoy having the time to appreciate the trees in my yard, and taking daily walks with my wife.

—Len Phillips

"I am trying to do my part to help arborists and landscape architects better understand each other..."



Gordon and Georgia Mann on a wine tasting tour in El Dorado County, California.

I retired early from my position as Redwood City, California Public Works Superintendent 12 ½ years ago because it was not fun anymore. It was too early for me to retire, as I still had to get the last of my three children through college. While in Redwood City, I'd developed a root barrier and also found other tree conservation products to market and have been doing this part-time, along with consulting, since 1986.

I did find a way to have a bigger influence in urban forestry—working at the Sacramento Tree Foundation as their Urban Forest Services Director. In that capacity, I was supporting 22 cities and 6 counties as they improved their urban forestry programs as participants in the region's Greenprint Initiative. When economic hard times hit, I and 9 other staff were laid off.

I took a position with a large local tree care company doing sales, training, and consulting that lasted a year, and then helped another good tree care company stay in business doing part-time sales when their management changed and they had no salesperson. I felt good about my role

because I need high-performing tree care companies to refer my consulting clients to.

I currently am consulting full-time with three great partners, along with the part-time conservation products sales; I'm building a new company with a partner in Vermont to grow better trees; I serve on two nonprofit boards (ISA & CaUFC); I participate in the ANSI A300 standards writing committee work; I serve as a WCISA proctor and assessor for arborist and tree-worker exams; and I am trying to finish my book, *The Trees Where People Live: Growing a Sustainable Urban and Community Forest*.

For recreation, I downhill ski, hike, and play golf, tennis, and softball. I plan to hike at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico with the Boy Scouts this summer. A grade-school friend just invited me to hike the Pacific Crest Trail with him, perhaps next year. That is a four-plus month commitment, so I am weighing whether to do it, but of course I would love to.

—Gordon Mann

Few 12-year-old kids know what they want to do when they grow up, but thanks to my family's frequent picnicking and camping in Upper Michigan and my proximity to Grand Trunk Western Railroad, I wanted to be a forester or a locomotive engineer. A full scholarship to Michigan Technological University made the decision very easy! I had a vocation and an avocation.

Over the course of 40 years I worked for cities like San José and Chico in California, Hayden and Coeur d'Alene in Idaho, and Missoula, Montana. I also worked for Davey Tree Surgery [sic], Forest-Ag, and the Idaho Department of Lands. I hung up my hat working for someone else on July 12, 2019. Remember that avocation? When in California, I was the Chief Arborist for the Niles Canyon Railway, a short-line museum railroad in the Bay Area with 12 miles of track. I was also a Qualified Conductor. Now that I am retired, I go back to the Bay Area to work on the railroad for a week or two at a time. Trains and trees—what could be a better combination?

My wife Julene and I own 40 acres of timber, so I get to practice my forestry skills. I am the Deputy Grand Knight at the Knights of Columbus Council 8872 in Colbert, Washington. I serve on the ISA Board of Directors, and I volunteer at the Inland Empire Railroad Museum in Reardan, Washington.

We cross-country ski right out of the garage. We can enjoy a glass or two of wine on our deck high on Mt. Spokane and watch thunderstorms 75 miles (121 km) away. We travel more frequently as well but just day and overnight trips, since we have llamas and alpacas. I like to build and remodel things; currently, a new garage addition and a first-floor master bedroom and bathroom are high on the list. Oh, and most important, I can sleep in until 7 or 8 a.m. No more hitting the alarm clock at 4 or 5 in the morning!

—Chris Boza

"Trains and trees—what could be a better combination?"



Mike Galvin on a consulting expert assignment regarding a public agency tree that failed.

I began my career as a municipal arborist for Prince George's County, Maryland. After a brief stint in DPW HQ, I was promoted to the DPW field operations office where we performed roadside vegetation management. I was there for a decade and then went to the MD DNR-Forest Service where I spent a few years as a regional Urban Forester and then a decade as Supervisor of Urban and Community Forestry (UCF).

While at MD DNR I had the opportunity to work with some fantastic partners (Morgan Grove and Dexter Locke, USFS; Jarlath O'Neil-Dunne, UVM) on urban tree canopy assessment. As we performed these assessments, we found that in most places, most of the existing and potential tree canopy was on residential private property. We also found programs of financial and technical assistance for rural public and private property, and for urban public property. However, there was a lack of resources to support tree canopy on urban private property.

Seeing this gap made me want to go "where the action is," so with my 23 years of state service in hand (I was able to take my county service to the state system), I left for the NGO sector where I was fortunate to help set the tree canopy goal for the nation's capital. I have since been in the private sector, as Director of SavATree Consulting Group, to help public and private landowners across the country manage their tree resources.

Some people told me I was crazy to "retire" from public service at that point, but it has been the right choice for me. My time in the public sector made me a better practitioner and provided me opportunities I never would have otherwise had. Serving in the public, NGO, and private sectors has been a great experience, and I am pleased that in the last decade or so we have finally started to see more resources for protection and enhancement of tree canopy on private property.

— Mike Galvin

On February 14th, 2020, I joined the ranks of retired municipal arborists after more than 34 years with the City of Columbia, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department. When I began working at the Parks Department in the fall of 1985, I assumed it would be only temporary. I had been doing landscaping on my own and had planned to get back to that. I quickly realized, however, that working for a municipality offered opportunities and rewards worth staying around for.

At that time, I had a B.S. in Horticulture and so I had a fairly decent grasp of tree biology and related concepts, but I was lacking in hands-on experience such as operating heavy equipment. My coworkers at the City of Columbia had a wide range of talents and knowledge to share. Over the years I reaped the dividends—many generously gave me guidance on all kinds of useful trades such as plumbing, construction, and equipment repair.

As I progressed up the ranks into a leadership position, the City provided managerial and supervisory training that I took full advantage of. One outcome of this training was developing skills in successful grant writing, which I often used to obtain funding for professional development for myself and other City staff. Attending the Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI), earning Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), and obtaining an ISA Certified Arborist certification are just some of the opportunities these grants provided myself and many others in the Columbia Parks Department.

The rewarding work of planting, protecting, and managing community trees hooked me from the beginning. Of course there were



some rough days along the line, as is true for anyone working in municipal forestry. For me, the key for getting through these days was focusing on the mission—caring for Columbia's city trees and other natural resources. In retirement, I see my role in this mission as changing to that of advocate and supporter. It's why I plan to stay actively involved with the Missouri Community Forestry Council, the Midwestern Chapter International Society of Arboriculture, and of course, the SMA.

I'll be spending my time on the 33 acres (13 ha) of Missouri woodlands I call home with my spouse, Carrie, pursuing projects of interest. In fact I've already completed one of these projects, having recently inoculated 40 oak logs with shiitake mushroom spawn. If all goes well, my newly inoculated logs will begin fruiting this fall, providing a bounty of delicious mushrooms to enjoy.

As with many things in life, reaping the rewards of this project will take some time, patience, and good fortune.

—Brett O'Brien

Rather than working with botanical trees as San José City Arborist, since retiring I have been working on my family tree. My mother's side of the family has been in America since the 1850s, but all of her ancestors have German roots. I have been able to track down where in Germany her ancestors originated from and even better, for the most part the church records for those villages are now online, free of charge, going back to the 1600s. This has allowed me to track down who many of my 7th or 8th great-grandparents and their descendants were.

My wife and I flew to Germany to visit these villages and try to imagine what they must have looked like hundreds of years ago. Thanks to connections with other researchers, we have met some of my distant German cousins, who have been genuinely interested in meeting their American cousin. All of my mother's family eventually settled in Richmond, Indiana and it has been interesting to see that the countryside of northwestern Germany where they came from sure looks similar to Indiana. I guess we tend

to seek out places that feel like home even though separated by thousands of miles with an ocean in between.

Here's a story I think you will find relatable. For the occasion of my 50th high school reunion, I'd gotten permission from the principal and went out and purchased a small valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), which is one of the native trees to Concord, California where I grew up. However, in echoes of the municipal bureaucracy I waded through in my career, it turned out that the school principal does not have the final word on the campus landscape, so we had to get permission from the school district office instead. The district was worried about the care and feeding, and eventual liability, of a potentially massive oak tree, so they nixed the idea. They said that perhaps a smaller tree would be okay, but they still have not given permission to proceed with a planting. So, one of my classmates who wanted to screen an unattractive view from his backyard was the recipient of the oak instead.

—Ralph Mize

"My wife and I flew to Germany to visit these villages and try to imagine what they must have looked like hundreds of years ago."