2026
Tennessee Urban Forestry Conference

Raising the Canopy

October 28 - 30, 2026

Memphis, TN
Memphis Botanic Garden

Hosted in Partnership by the
Tennessee Urban Forestry Council and
Tennessee Division of Forestry

Sponsored by FedEx Cares

Program Agenda

Last Updated: 10/25/2026

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TENNESSEE URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28

Pre-Conference Workshop | Sara's Place | Sponsored by **Rainbow Ecoscience**	
12:00 - 4:30 PM	**Urban Forestry Credential Preparatory Course** *Paul Ries, Owner, Insightful Nature LLC* Whether you're preparing for the *ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional* or *SAF Certified Urban & Community Forester* credential, this half-day workshop will help you study smarter and approach the exam with confidence. The course combines key concepts from both certification frameworks into a practical, scenario-based learning experience. Rather than attempting to teach every exam topic, this workshop is designed to help participants identify their strengths, recognize knowledge gaps, and develop an effective study plan. Through instructor-led discussion, practice questions, and proven test-taking strategies, attendees will gain a clearer understanding of exam expectations while reinforcing core principles of urban forest planning, arboriculture, policy, operations, and community engagement.

Welcome Party | Tropical Plant House (Glasshouse) Patio | Sponsored by **FedEx Cares**	
6:00 – 9:00 PM	**Welcome Party** Kick off the conference with a fun evening featuring a **haunted forest-themed costume contest** and a chance to'connect with FedEx Cares' 12 flagship cities across the globe. Memphis Botanic Garden staff will begin offering guided tours of the grounds before the welcome party from 5:30 PM until dusk. Tours of the Tropical Plant House will be offered after dusk.

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

Exhibitor Reception & Registration | Exhibitor Hall | Sponsored by **Outdoor Solutions**	
7:30 – 9:00 AM	**Coffee Reception with Exhibitors** Check in, pick up your attendee packet, and visit with exhibitors. Coffee and pastries will be provided.

Opening General Session | Goldsmith	
9:00 – 9:05 AM	**Welcome to the 2026 Tennessee Urban Forestry Conference** *Sarah Welz, President, Tennessee Urban Forestry Council* *Margaret McQuiston, President, West TN Chapter of TUFC*
9:05 – 10:00 AM	**Host Community Spotlight: Memphis Urban & Community Forestry** Welcome Remarks: *Justice Bolden, Director of Memphis Parks* Moderator: *Margaret McQuiston, Memphis City Beautiful* Panel: *Eric Bridges, Overton Park Conservancy* *Ryan Hall, Wolf River Conservancy* *Wes Hopper, Urban Forestry Consulting* *Annalise Riekerk, Memphis Native Tree Works* *Scott Woods, Bartlett Tree Experts* The opening session will provide an overview of active urban forestry efforts in Memphis and West Tennessee. We'll hear from local leaders advancing urban and community forestry, including arborists, municipal professionals, nonprofit leaders, and researchers.
10:00 – 10:25 AM	**Updates from the TN Division of Forestry** *Ashley Kite-Rowland, U&CF Program Coordinator, TN Division of Forestry* Hear the latest from the Tennessee Division of Forestry on urban and community forestry programs, resources, funding opportunities, and statewide initiatives. Ashley Kite-Rowland will share key updates and what Tennessee's urban forestry community should have on its radar.
10:25 – 10:50 AM	**Canopy at the Capitol: A 2026 Tennessee Urban Forestry Legislative Update** *Mike Jameson, Nashville Metro Water Services* *Steph Mahnke, Executive Director, Nashville Tree Conservation Corps* Tennessee's urban forestry community had a busy legislative year — with some quiet wins, a few close calls, and enough unfinished business to keep us occupied well into 2027. This session offers a practical rundown of state and local legislation that moved, stalled, or surprised us in 2026, and a look at what's likely to come back around next session. We'll spend time on one issue in particular: a promising tax incentive model for private canopy investment that could open new doors for tree preservation on private lands statewide. We'll close with a look at where the advocacy opportunities are heading into next year and how you can plug in — whether you're deep in the policy weeds already or just looking for a place to start.

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Break with Exhibitors | Exhibitor Hall	
10:50 – 11:05 AM	**Break** Visit with exhibitors. Snacks and refreshments provided.

Keynote Presentation | Goldsmith	
11:05 AM – 12:00 PM	**Tree Quest: Growing Healthy Trees in the Urban Realm** *Leslie Berckes, Executive Director, Urban & Community Forestry Society* Urban foresters and arborists face unique challenges and celebrate equally extraordinary achievements in communities large and small. The universe of professionals, places, and stakeholders needed to grow healthy trees where people live is vast, and we know that it takes each person playing their part to achieve our goals. Join us to hear from Leslie Berckes, Executive Director of the Urban and Community Forestry Society as she introduces us to the "urban forestry multiverse," the totally made up, yet very real, place where we do tree work each day in Tennessee. Leslie will share stories from urban foresters in our community of practice and provide inspiration for how we can "level up" to find our fellow tree people, work with them on tree quests, and grow the ultimate treasure – healthy trees.

Awards Luncheon | Goldsmith | Sponsored by **Bartlett Tree Experts**	
12:00 – 12:20 PM	**Lunch Buffet Opens**
12:20 – 12:35 PM	**TUFC 2026 Year in Review** *Daniel Charlton, Vice President, TUFC*
12:35 – 12:50 PM	**Awards of Excellence** *Sarah Welz, President, TUFC*
12:50 – 1:05 PM	**Landmark, Historic, and Heritage Trees** *Tom Simpson, Program Chair, TUFC*
1:05 - 1:30 PM	**Break / Transition to Field Tours**

A. Field Tour | Bus + Walking Tour	
1:30 – 4:30 PM *Bus departs at 1:30 PM*	**Urban Silviculture: Oak Recruitment in Urban Forest Patches** *Eric Bridges, Director of Conservation, Overton Park Conservancy* During this field tour, participants will walk through the Old Forest State Natural Area, a 126-acre urban forest patch, in Overton Park. The tour will be led by Dr. Eric Bridges and Charity Berhe (Rhodes College undergraduate student). The topic will be urban silviculture — the blending of arboriculture with traditional silviculture. On the tour, participants will see examples of urban oak recruitment research being conducted by Overton Park Conservancy and Rhodes College. The research will be placed in the context of broader oak recruitment challenges across the eastern deciduous forest, with discussion of how urban silviculture may also inform oak management in rural forests.

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B. Field Tour | Bus + Walking Tour | Sponsored by **Haller's Landscaping & Nursery**	
1:30 – 4:30 PM *Bus departs at 1:30 PM*	**Rooted Together: Engaging Community Through Urban Orchards** *Nakeva Williams, Urban Orchard Manager, The Works* Explore how community orchards are transforming vacant land, strengthening neighborhoods, and expanding access to fresh food across Memphis. This tour will visit the Memphis Native Tree Works nursery in Frayser, where orchard trees and native plants are grown; a newly installed orchard at an adjacent affordable senior housing development; and the established Leath Street Orchard in the Medical District. The Works, in partnership with The Giving Grove, has developed a network of more than 30 free-to-harvest community orchards, primarily on previously vacant land in Low Income & Low Access Memphis neighborhoods. Participants will learn how the program has evolved from orchard installation to long-term activation and stewardship, including efforts to engage neighborhood residents as Orchard Stewards who help care for, promote, and build community around the orchards nearest their homes.

C. Workshop | Goldsmith	
1:30 – 4:30 PM	**Trees & Construction: Planning, Protection & Post-Construction Care** *Mark Follis, Owner, Follis Tree Preservation* *Wes Hopper, Owner, Urban Forestry Consulting* This comprehensive workshop will combine classroom instruction and outdoor demonstration to cover tree protection and care before, during, and after construction. Topics include **pre-construction** tree surveys, tree management plans, and monetary security; **during construction** stop-work authority and coordination with engineering and codes; and **post-construction** plant health care, including compensatory pruning, mycorrhizal injections, deep-root treatments, and other strategies.

Evening Program | Sculpture Garden | Sponsored by **Davey Resource Group & Davey Tree Expert Co.**	
4:30 – 5:45 PM	**President's Reception & Silent Auction | Sculpture Garden** Cash bar and appetizers will be available beginning at 4:30 PM upon returning from the field tours and conclusion of the Trees & Construction Workshop. Final bidding period for the silent auction.
5:45 – 6:15 PM	**Tennessee Champion Trees | Goldsmith** *Kayla Stuart, Director, Tennessee Champion Tree Program, University of Tennessee* The Tennessee Champion Tree Program identifies and catalogs the largest native trees in Tennessee. Join us in recognizing the 2026 Tennessee Champion Trees.
6:15 PM	**Explore Memphis** Take the evening to dine out and explore the city!

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

Breakfast | Goldsmith and Sara's Place	
7:30 – 8:15 AM	**Breakfast** Hot breakfast buffet and coffee with exhibitors.

A. Breakout Session: Strengthening Municipal Urban Forestry Programs | Goldsmith A	
8:15 – 9:40 AM	**Panel: Building Capacity for Urban Forestry Programs** Moderator: *Ashley Kite-Rowland, U&CF Program Coordinator, TN Division of Forestry* Panel: *Leslie Berckes, Executive Director, Urban & Community Forestry Society* *Wes Hopper, Owner, Urban Forestry Consulting (Memphis)* *Cole Johnson, City Forester, City of Chattanooga* *Kraig Smith, Chair, Bell Buckle Tree Board* Urban forestry programs across Tennessee operate at different scales, but many face common challenges in building the capacity needed to grow and sustain their efforts. This moderated panel brings together leaders from communities of varying sizes to explore strategies for securing resources and local government support, expanding program capabilities, and making the most of available tools and partnerships. Drawing on experiences with building capacity for maintenance, ordinance development and enforcement, storm preparedness, and other local priorities, panelists will share lessons learned, creative solutions, and practical approaches to strengthening urban forestry programs.
9:40 – 9:50 AM	**Break**
9:50 – 11:15 AM	**Municipal Exchange: Peer-to-Peer Conversation** Facilitator: *Ashley Kite-Rowland, U&CF Program Coordinator, TN Division of Forestry* Build on ideas and questions raised during the preceding panel through informal conversation with fellow urban forestry professionals, consultants, tree board members, and community advocates. Guided by participant interests, this flexible session offers an opportunity to share experiences, explore common challenges, and connect with peers working to strengthen urban forestry programs in their communities.

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B. Breakout Session: Arboricultural Practices | Goldsmith B	
8:15 – 11:15 AM	**Plant Health Care Workshop: Diagnostics, Equipment & Production** *Chris Diffley, Consulting Arborist, Arbor Ki* *Mark Ware, Arborologist, Rainbow Ecoscience* This hands-on workshop will take participants through the Plant Health Care (PHC) process from diagnosis to treatment and production. Combining classroom instruction, field diagnostics, and equipment demonstrations, participants will explore how to evaluate plant health concerns, develop appropriate recommendations, and effectively deliver PHC services. The workshop will connect sound diagnostic practices with the equipment, application techniques, safety considerations, and production workflows needed to put recommendations into practice.
8:15 – 10:15 AM	**Part 1: Diagnostics & PHC Fundamentals** *Classroom + Field* Build a foundation for effective PHC through a combination of classroom discussion and hands-on field diagnostics. Participants will review PHC fundamentals and the process of diagnosing plant health concerns before heading into the field to evaluate real-world issues. Together, the group will review diagnostic findings and discuss appropriate recommendations and treatment options.
10:15 - 10:25 AM	Break
10:25 – 11:15 AM	**Part 2: PHC Equipment, Application & Production** *Demonstration + Discussion* The workshop will conclude with a practical look at PHC equipment and production, including equipment operation, product preparation and application, safety, calibration, maintenance, and efficient production workflows. Participants will leave with a better understanding of how sound diagnostics and effective production practices work together to achieve successful PHC outcomes.

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C. Breakout Session: Community Forestry in Action | Sara's Place	
8:15 – 9:40 AM	**Workshop: Cultivating Partnerships Rooted in Community** *Olliette Murry-Drobot, Founder & Principal Consultant, O2 Strategic Partners* *Bertram Williams Jr., Community Advocate and Artist* Meaningful community projects begin with meaningful community relationships. In this interactive workshop, two experienced Memphis leaders will share perspectives and lessons from working directly with communities to build trust, strengthen partnerships, and turn local priorities into action. With particular attention to engaging vulnerable populations, participants will explore approaches to authentic engagement when developing projects that respond to local needs.
9:40 - 9:50 AM	**Break**
9:50 – 11:15 AM	**Lightning Rounds: Community Forestry in Action** Moderator: *Kayla Stuart, Creator, TreeCPR* These shortform presentations will highlight projects from six local organizations. Fast-paced, practical, and inspiring, this session will offer diverse examples of how community projects can support urban forestry. City of Memphis Community Planting Projects *Margaret McQuiston, Memphis City Beautiful* - Learn about the various tree planting projects across Memphis led by the city and their partners. Beyond Beautification: Connecting Urban Forestry, CPTED, and Community Safety *Joe Gurley, SafeWays* - Drawing on SafeWays' work in Memphis, this presentation will introduce Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and examine how factors such as visibility, vegetation management, maintenance, native landscaping, and resident stewardship can influence how people use and experience shared spaces. Attendees will gain a new perspective on how urban forestry can complement public safety strategies. TEC's UCF Program in Memphis *Mahima Giri, Tennessee Environmental Council (TEC)* - This presentation will highlight the accomplishments and lessons learned from TEC's Urban and Community Forestry program in Memphis, including tree planting and giveaways, volunteer mobilization, Tree Ambassador recruitment, and local partnerships. Land Trusts as Urban & Community Forestry Partners *Ryan Hall, Wolf River Conservancy* - This presentation will highlight restoration and conservation efforts alongside WRC's approach to engaging people through volunteer projects, hikes, paddle trips, and other experiences — and demonstrate how land trusts can be valuable partners in urban and community forestry. Growing Community Forestry Through the West TN Chapter of TUFC *Judi Shellabarger, West TN Chapter of TUFC* - The West TN Chapter works alongside the Memphis Botanic Garden, a TUFC Center of Excellence, to turn volunteer expertise into community impact. Learn how the chapter and the MBG's Tree Team support arboreta and community forests across the region. Rooted in Time: Trees as Vessels of History and Resilience *Jonathan Reid, PTTP* - This presentation will explore culturally relevant approaches to community forestry, including how certain groups in urban communities may have complex or traumatic historical relationships with the outdoors and trees. Drawing on the history of Memphis and legacy pollution, the session will consider how trees can be reframed as community assets and not liabilities.

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Break with Exhibitors | Exhibitor Hall	
11:15 – 11:30 AM	**Break** Last chance to visit with exhibitors. Snacks and refreshments provided.

Closing Session | Sara's Place	
11:30 – 12:00 PM	**Connecting the Pieces: Partnership from National to Local** *Jeff Malcolm, Senior Director of Corporate Relations, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation* Together with NFWF and FedEx Cares, we'll explore how corporate, government, nonprofit, and community partners can come together to support local conservation projects to restore urban watersheds, encourage stewardship of natural resources, and foster community environmental outreach. The session will culminate in a special announcement and celebration of the Memphis organization selected to receive NFWF Five Star funding, highlighting how their work on the ground will connect Memphis to a larger effort.
12:00 – 12:15 PM	**Looking Ahead: TUFC 2030 and Closing Remarks** *Sarah Welz, President, TUFC* Join TUFC President Sarah Welz for a preview of TUFC 2030, the Council's emerging strategic plan for the years ahead. Guided by three pillars — **Cultivate the Network; Educate, Equip, Engage; and Champion Tennessee's Urban Forests** — the plan charts a path toward a more connected, engaged, and influential statewide urban forestry community. Learn how TUFC is working to strengthen member leadership and representation across Tennessee, and how you can help shape what's next. We'll preview opportunities to help inform statewide priorities, participate in board leadership and committees, and lend your expertise to ongoing and emerging efforts. Discover how your voice and involvement can help bring TUFC 2030 to life.

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