

THURSDAY OCTOBER 22, 2026

- 7:30 AM** **Registration & Exhibits Open**
- 8:30 AM** **101st Annual Conference Opening Program**
- 8:30 AM** **NJUCF CORE Training Check -In** (*concurrent program*)
- 9:00 AM** **General Education:** Missives, Misunderstandings and Mixed Signals: Civil Discussions of Science Based Landscape Management in an Era of Misinformation and Change – *Greg Paige*
- 10:00 AM** **Coffee Break with Exhibitors**
- 10:30 AM** **General Education:** Urban Tree Survival and Program Success – *Dr. Deborah Hilbert*
- 11:30 AM** **NJ Shade Tree Federation Awards Presentation**
- 11:45 AM** **Luncheon**
- 1:00 PM** **Breakout Track: Tech & Trees**
Pretending Carefully: AI Literacy for Tree Professionals – *Holly Branco*
Branching Out: Beyond the Chat Window Applications of Artificial Intelligence – *William Zipse*
From Hindsight to Foresight: Leveraging AI for a Proactive Safety Culture – *Dan Oberlies*
Why Should I be using DRONES and Other Tech? – *Gene Huntington*
- 1:00 PM** **Breakout Track: Problems & Pests**
Oak Wilt Disease: How Sap Beetles Spread a Deadly Tree Pathogen – *Dr. Karandeep Singh Chahal*
Evergreens Got You Down? Find Out What Makes Them Turn Brown – *Sabrina Tirpak*
- 3:00 PM** **Coffee Break with Exhibitors**
- 3:30 PM** **Breakout Track: Community Forest Management**
Tree Selection for Future Climates, Decision-Making & Nursery Availability – *Dr. Deborah Hilbert*
- 3:30 PM** **Breakout Track: Tree Care Success**
The Three Phases of Successful Tree Planting: Pre, During and Post – *Greg Paige*
- 4:30 PM** **Networking Event**

FRIDAY OCTOBER 23, 2026

- 7:30 AM** **Registration & Exhibits**
- 8:30 AM** **NJUCF Workshop:** Digital Tool Kit: Tree Canopy Assessment – *NJ Forest Service*
- 9:00 AM** **General Education:** An Overview of the Casey Tree Program – *Mark Buscaino*
- 10:00 AM** **Coffee Break with Exhibitors**
- 10:30 AM** **NJUCF Workshop** Digital Tool Kit: Using Data to Inform Community Forestry Management – *Taylor Sapudar*
- 10:30 AM** **General Education:** Building a Municipal Tree Profile in NJ – *Dr. Jason Grabosky*
- 11:30 AM** **NJUCF Workshop** RFP Development, A Working Lunch Session – *NJ Forest Service*
- 11:30 AM** **NJ Forest Service Awards Presentation**
- 11:45 AM** **Luncheon**
- 1:00 PM** **Breakout Track: Tiny Forests**
Magical or Practical: Understanding Trees, Soil, and Community through Tiny Forests – *Josh Kover*
Forest Service Panel: NJ Tiny Forest Project Examples – *Inga Reigh & John Evangelista*
- 1:00 PM** **Breakout Track: Problems & Pests**
Urban Soils – *Dr. Neil Hendrickson*
The Usual Suspects: Cracking Cases in Urban Tree Pest Diagnostics – *Amber Stiller*
- 3:00 PM** **Coffee Break**
- 3:30 PM** **Breakout Track: Community Forest Management:**
Panel: So, What do you want, how can you get it? – *Mark Buscaino, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Dr. Deborah Hilbert*
- 3:30 PM** **Breakout Track: Tree Care Success**
A300 Standards – Who Needs Them? – *Wayne Dubin & Stephen Chisholm Jr.*
- 4:30 PM** **End of Day** – *thank you for joining us for the 101st!*

CONFERENCE SESSIONS THURSDAY OCTOBER 22, 2026

General Education Sessions

“Missives, Misunderstandings and Mixed Signals: Civil Discussions of Scienced Based Landscape Management in an Era of Misinformation and Change” – *Greg Paige, Director of Horticulture, The JC Raulston Arboretum*

–This talk will discuss our changing landscapes in an era of both too much and too little good old fashioned science based information.

Greg Paige discovered his career goal early-creating and working in beautiful public gardens and sharing and teaching this passion with others. Prior to joining the JC Raulston Arboretum Greg worked at the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratory as Director of Horticulture and Arboretum Curator. His 30-year career in public horticulture involved work at some of the finest gardens in the country. Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden in Belmont, North Carolina, the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College, the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, the Holden Arboretum outside Cleveland, Ohio and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

“Urban Tree Survival and Program Success” – *Dr. Deborah (Deb) Hilbert, Assistant Professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry, SUNY College*

– This talk discusses the current research on mortality rates and factors influencing urban tree survival and then proposes strategies we can use to improve tree planting initiative success.

Dr. Deb Hilbert is an urban tree scientist, strategist, and educator. She is Assistant Professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry at ESF, where she conducts research on urban tree establishment and survival; nursery tree diversity, quality and availability; and urban tree selection. As a Vice President of the Arboricultural Research and Education Academy, an ISA Certified Arborist (+TRAQ), and consultant, she brings both scientific expertise and practical field experience to understanding how we can help urban trees thrive.

Breakout Track: Trees & Tech

Pretending Carefully: AI Literacy for Tree Professionals – *Holly Branco*

–“We are what we pretend to be, so we must be very careful what we pretend to be.” —Kurt Vonnegut. Is AI going to replace us all? Is it an

overhyped scam? Is it the bane of our environment? Is it...conscious? Whether you're using ChatGPT daily, boycotting AI for moral reasons, or still getting used to the World Wide Web, you can't deny that artificial intelligence is moving history. The stories we tell about AI will shape every industry's future—including arboriculture. In this talk, I argue that tree professionals should become AI-literate if they want to secure a long-term place for human arborists in tree work. I catch everyone up to speed on the state of AI, report on how AI is impacting the workforce, examine AI's strengths and weaknesses, and highlight the skills that will be in-demand in the coming years. Rest assured, AI did not write this synopsis—but it most certainly could have.

Holly Branco manages operations at an AI policy advocacy nonprofit in Washington, DC. She holds a dual degree in philosophy and English from Boston College, where she studied the ethics of emerging technologies. Holly formerly served as Program Associate at the New Jersey Shade Tree Federation. (You may have seen her running around last year's conference with a camera.)

Branching Out: Beyond the Chat Window Applications of Artificial Intelligence - *William Zipse, Supervising Forester, NJ Forest Service* -

This session will focus on practical ways artificial intelligence can support forestry, arboriculture, and shade tree work. Rather than treating AI as a novelty or a single tool, the presentation will show how it can be used as a flexible problem-solving partner for organizing data, working with reports, automating repetitive tasks, supporting analysis, and creating custom workflows. Attendees will leave with a better understanding of the many ways AI can be applied to forestry work and how to begin evaluating where it may be useful in their own organizations.

William (Bill) Zipse is a Supervising Forester with the New Jersey Forest Service, where he has spent 25 years working at the intersection of forest science and data analytics. His work spans public lands management, forest health, and New Jersey's Forest Carbon and Climate Initiative, with a growing focus on generative AI, machine learning, and open-source software development. He holds degrees from Paul Smith's College and Northern Arizona University, and a Graduate Certificate in Data Mining from NJIT.

“From Hindsight to Foresight: Leveraging AI for a Proactive Safety Culture” – Dan Oberlies, Vice President of Environmental, Health & Safety at Asplundh Tree Expert, LLC – This session is a look into how Asplundh is leveraging the newest AI technologies to promote safer work environments.

Dan Oberlies is Vice President of Environmental, Health & Safety at Asplundh Tree Expert, LLC, providing senior leadership for a global Safety Operations Team of 43 professionals supporting vegetation management operations across the United States (including Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. With more than 35 years in the utility line clearance industry—and over 30 years of experience leading safety, training, risk management, claims and insurance programs—he has helped advance industry standards and best practices through proactive training, field audits, incident-prevention initiatives, and safety analytics. A proponent of using AI and advanced safety analytics, he focuses on identifying trends and leading indicators to strengthen prevention efforts and drive continuous improvement. A founding member of the Utility Line Clearance Safety Partnership, he is the organization’s current President and has served on the ANSI Z133 (ASC Z133) committee and other safety and regulatory groups. At Asplundh, his goal is to keep building on the company’s safety momentum so every employee goes home each day the same way they came to work. As Oberlies puts it: “Safety is not a slogan—it’s a responsibility we share, every task, every day.”

“Why Should I Be Using DRONES and Other Tech?” – Gene Huntington, RLA, LEEP AP, UAS Special Operations, Research & Development Director, Steward Green - With higher demands on our time in the field, how can we perform great work with less time? UAS (Drones) Sensing & Spatial Analysis, Acoustic Analysis Systems and Visual Monitoring are ALL more user friendly and affordable than ever. Some of these systems encourage instant distribution of information to large groups, stakeholders and communities to provide transparent communications on developments from the field. Gene will present case studies describing how these technologies helped do the work of multiple people and saved valuable resources! Learn how they navigated budgets

while still developing insightful data sets that are easily analyzed for better management moving forward. Participants will walk away with knowledge of tools and applications that promote better efficiencies and communication for their projects.

Gene is a professional ecological land planner and consultant with degrees from Penn State and Columbia Business School. He led a team that designed a UAS system to fly hundreds of miles in Liberia to fly blood samples and medical supplies during the Ebola outbreak in Liberia West Africa, intended to save lives and increase tech jobs for Liberians. He has orchestrated some of the largest ecological projects in the US. Gene's development of UAS heat signature analysis, methodology and mapping has become the standard for these studies. Gene has been honored with NJ Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence twice, as well as awards from EPA and others for his work in agroecology and improving water quality. He is the former Director of Research for Duke Farms and founder of Steward Green, an innovative UAS and ecological consulting firm. The Duke Farms Eagle Cam has been one of Mr. Huntington's innovations, setting the standard for placed based wildlife habitat education for over 17 years now and has reached over 15 million viewers worldwide. He has led and led successful projects throughout the US and abroad, most notably for his agroecology application in Rivercess, Liberia. For fun, he likes to teach his grandkids how to observe Black bears in the wild.

Breakout Track: Problems & Pests

“Oak Wilt Disease: How Sap Beetles Spread a Deadly Tree Pathogen”
- *Karandeep Singh Chahal, Postdoctoral Associate, Rutgers University, New Brunswick* - Oak wilt is one of the most destructive tree diseases of oaks in North America. It has been confirmed in neighboring states of New Jersey, including New York and Pennsylvania. New Jersey's red oak-dominated landscapes are at serious risk. Dr. Chahal will cover pathogen biology and epidemiology, including how sap beetles spread the disease and how root grafts allow it to move between neighboring trees. Attendees will learn to recognize oak wilt symptoms, distinguish them from common look-alikes, and understand when to seek laboratory confirmation. The session will include prevention strategies and highlights

from his ongoing Rutgers research aimed at developing New Jersey's first region-specific oak wilt management guidelines.

Dr. Karandeep Singh Chahal recently joined as a postdoctoral associate in the Urban Forestry Program and the Department of Plant Biology at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. His multidisciplinary research experience integrates plant pathology, mycology, entomology, and population genetics with advanced molecular diagnostics to develop practical, integrated disease management strategies. Dr. Chahal earned his PhD in Forest Pathology from Michigan State University, East Lansing, and his master's in Entomology and Plant Pathology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

“Evergreens Got You Down? Find Out What Makes Them Turn Brown” - Sabrina Tirpak, Laboratory Researcher, Rutgers Plant Diagnostic Laboratory - This presentation will spruce up your knowledge of diseases and insect pests that affect ornamental evergreens in the landscape. Each organism will be profiled to include biology and life cycle, the conditions leading to outbreaks, diagnostic tools, and integrated control strategies that include useful cultural, biological, and chemical management techniques.

Sabrina Tirpak is the Laboratory Researcher at the Rutgers Plant Diagnostic Laboratory. She received her B.S. in Plant Science from Rutgers University, with an emphasis in horticulture and turf industries, as well as, a minor in entomology. Sabrina has over 28 years of experience in all things that can and do go wrong with plants and teaching people about them. She is a frequent lecturer and invited speaker at various conferences and educational programs throughout the tri-state area on the topics of turf, ornamental, and structural insect pest problems. Sabrina is also an instructor in the Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management Program where she teaches laboratory courses in diseases and insect pests of turfgrass and ornamental plants.

Breakout Track: Community Forest Management

“Tree Selection for Future Climates, Decision-Making & Nursery Availability” – Dr. Deborah Hilbert - Researchers have developed promising models and tools for climate-ready tree selection, but

translating these into practical decisions remains difficult. This talk presents a decision framework for climate-ready urban tree selection that synthesizes existing tools (e.g., USDA Climate Change Tree Atlas, climate analog applications, and vulnerability metrics) while confronting a critical gap: the disconnect between what lists recommend and what practitioners can actually source. Drawing on research into urban tree nursery supply chains, we'll examine how liner production methods, geography, and regional sourcing constraints shape what's possible. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of available decision-support resources, the key tradeoffs involved in climate-adapted species selection and realistic strategies for incorporating climate-readiness into planting decisions given current supply chain realities. (*See Dr. Hilbert's bio on page 11*)

Breakout Track: Tree Care Success

“The Three Phases of Successful Tree Planting: Pre, During and Post” – Greg Paige, Director of Horticulture, The JC Raulston Arboretum – It is very easy to oversimplify Tree Planting and to move on to brighter, more pressing issues once trees are in the ground. Let's examine finer details that will ensure that these valuable resources are successful and live long, healthy lives. Starting with diversity, plant selection, proper planting techniques, all those important cultural considerations and the need for pruning and continued monitoring. (*See Director Paige's bio on page 11*)

CONFERENCE SESSIONS FRIDAY OCTOBER 23, 2026

NJUCF Workshop:

“Digital Tool Kit: Tree Canopy Assessment” – NJ Forest Service - This workshop will explore how local tree managers can utilize Arbor Day Foundation/PlanIT Geo's TreeCanopy.us web mapping tool and Treesatwork.org data hub. TreeCanopy.us is the Detailed urban tree canopy assessment tool that uses state of the art Lidar map layers to compare historical and present urban tree canopy.

General Education Session:

“An Overview of the Casey Tree Program” – *Marc Buscaino, Senior Advisor, Casey Trees*- Synopsis forthcoming.

NJUCF Workshop:

“Digital Tool Kit: Using Data to Inform Community Forestry Management” -*Taylor Sapudar, Princeton Municipal Arborist* - This workshop will dive into how municipal tree managers can utilize their urban forest inventory data. Attendees will learn from Princeton Municipal Arborist, Taylor Sapudar, who will demonstrate practical applications of inventory data for maintenance planning, risk assessment, and strategic decision-making. Participants will discover how to transform data into actionable insights that enhance tree management programs and communicate the value of urban forests to community stakeholders.

General Education Session:

“Building a Municipal Tree Profile in NJ” – *Dr. Jason Grabosky, Rutgers Urban Forestry Program* – Synopsis forthcoming

NJUCF Workshop:

“RFP Development, A Working Lunch Session” – *NJ Forest Service* - This lunchtime session will be an opportunity to ask Request-for-Proposal (RFP) related questions to a variety of urban forest professionals from the NJUCF, consultants, municipal foresters, and others. Whether you're writing your first RFP or refining your procurement process, our experienced urban forestry professionals will provide practical guidance on developing scopes of work, evaluating contractors, and managing contracts. Bring your questions about tree inventory RFPs, maintenance contracts, planting projects, and more in this informal Q&A format.

Breakout Track: Tiny Forests

“Magical or Practical: Understanding Trees, Soil, and Community through Tiny Forests” – *Josh Kover, Rutgers University* - Tiny forests are becoming a very trendy method of planting trees in urban and suburban areas. The methodology is quite practical, utilizing industry best practices of planting appropriate native trees, utilizing smaller stock, in amended soil, with community participation... nothing new. However, the supposed results sound sensational... almost magical: the most common

being that the densely planted trees store more carbon and grow faster than a normal tree planting. As public discourse on tiny forests has become increasingly popular, so have the magical claims attributed to the method. That being said, despite the magical claims, people are finally following best practices in their design, installation, site preparation, and community engagement. As a result, their urban trees are healthier, and their communities are happier. This presentation gives an introduction to the current Tiny-Forest discourse, outlines the history, and discusses the theory: what is practical and what might be magical. Upon completion, participants will understand the best urban forestry practices used in tiny forests and how they can be used in all tree projects, including but not limited to tiny forests

Forest Service Panel: NJ Tiny Forests Project Examples - *John Evangelista - Groundwork Elizabeth & Inga Reigh - Princeton Open Space* - Tiny forests, often called micro forests or mini forests, are the latest trend in community forestry. In this panel discussion, you will hear from two New Jersey communities that have installed tiny forests. Panelists will discuss the challenges of installation and maintenance, as well as the benefits these unique approaches to urban greening bring to their communities. Short presentations will be followed by a Q&A session.

Breakout Track: Problems & Pests

“Urban Soils” – Dr. Neil Hendrickson, former Northeast Technical Researcher, Bartlett Tree, now happily retired –Forget about the trees for a minute- there’s a whole host of problems present before we even break ground for planting in an urban setting. Neil digs into the underground challenges and gives us some insights and soil management techniques which can promote healthier, longer-lived urban trees.

Neil Hendrickson worked for Bartlett Tree Research Labs where he served as their Northeast Technical Specialist for over twenty years before his retirement in 2019. Neil is a New Jersey Licensed Tree Expert and maintains his tree risk assessment qualifications. He received his Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Cook College/Rutgers University, his Master of Science in Forest Science from the University of New

Hampshire, and his Ph.D. in Silviculture and Forest Ecology from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

“The Usual Suspects: Cracking Cases in Urban Tree Pest Diagnostics” – *Amber Stille, Research Technician, Bartlett Tree*

Experts- Urban trees are often exposed to a variety of biotic and abiotic stressors that can look strikingly similar at first glance. Accurately distinguishing between these issues is essential in formulating effective management strategies for ornamental landscapes. During this session, we will take on the role of detectives, using a field-based diagnostic approach to evaluate key signs and symptoms of common pests and diseases. By the end, you will be better equipped to identify the culprit behind common tree health issues and make informed decisions in the field.

Amber Stiller is a Research Technician with Bartlett Tree Experts, a science-based tree care company that manages urban trees across North America, England, and Ireland. Amber is based at the Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories in Charlotte, NC, where she is involved in a variety of research projects that aim to formulate management strategies that promote urban tree health. Amber holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from UNC Charlotte and a Master of Science in Entomology from The Ohio State University.

Breakout Track: Community Forest Management

“Panel: So what do you want, how can you get it?” – *Mark Buscaino, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Dr. Deborah Hilbert* - We often talk about getting diverse tree species into the landscape. We also often observe there are limits to what folks can seemingly find available for purchase in their systems. Growers of trees are in a thin margin business model, and the scale of costs to introduce a new species into product line can be damaging to the business, particularly if after years of growing to size and making the system for use... there is no market, or the market interest moved on. This extended question-answer panel session is to listen to what communities “want” and where they see the challenges. We hope to develop the broad conversation and some perspectives-solution plans to meet the tree stewardship community and the professional growing

community to build a safe and stable market with diversity and economic viability.

Breakout Track: Tree Care Success

“A300 Standards – Who Needs Them?” – *Wayne Dubin & Stephen Chisholm Jr.* - Steve and Wayne will share insights on the ever-evolving ANSI A300 Standards for Tree Care. Understanding the competitive advantage of being an accredited company, embracing the industry standards, especially for pruning, which represents such a large portion of the work we perform for clients, and raising the bar of professionalism throughout our industry are important goals and focus points of our presentation.

After graduation, **Wayne Dubin** went to work as an Account Executive for Gruntal & Co. In January 1989, he joined the F. A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co. in Westchester County, New York as an Arborist Representative. In 1993 he was promoted and transferred to Local Manager in Warren, New Jersey and subsequently became District Manager and then Assistant Division Manager for the Metropolitan Division in April 1999. Wayne currently serves as Vice-President and Division Manager for Bartlett’s Metro-West Division (New Jersey and New York, excluding Long Island) managing ten offices and forty-two Arborist Representatives. He has a successful record of accomplishment in sales and sales management for forty years. Mr. Dubin Vice-Chair of the ANSI A300 Committee for Tree Care Standards and is a Past President of the NJ Arborists, Chapter ISA as well as the NJ Shade Tree Federation. He is the treasurer for NY State Arborists. Wayne resides in Mendham, New Jersey.

Stephen Chisholm is a third-generation arborist serving as COO and Head Arborist at Aspen Tree Expert Co., Inc in Jackson NJ. He is an ISA Certified Arborist and a NJ Licensed Tree Expert and is currently serving as President of the NJ Society of Licensed Tree Experts. Steve is a member of the ANSI-A300 Committee, serving on the pruning, lightning protection, tree risk and tree support systems committees, and likes to be a tree evangelist, sharing the importance of proper tree care and use of industry standards.

NJ Shade Tree Federation 101st Annual Conference Preliminary Program

For the latest event information visit WWW.NJSTF.ORG



NEW JERSEY SHADE TREE FEDERATION

Blake Hall, Cook College

93 Lipman Drive

New Brunswick, NJ 08901

(732) 246-3210

TREES@NJSTF.ORG

www.njstf.org

“Trees turn cities into hometowns.” -William J. Porter