

Goodbye Valerie, Hello Ashley

Once again, one of our TCA staff members has moved on to bigger and more influential positions in urban forestry at the state level. Valerie McClannahan left her role as Urban and Community Forestry Volunteer Programs Coordinator this past April and began a new career as a community engagement project manager for the Department of Natural Resources. So despite our loss, she is still honing her skills as an urban and community forester working with volunteers and communities throughout the state. We all wish her the best and know that she will excel in this position.

Despite that change, we have a new successor, yet another outstanding graduate of the University of Minnesota who has been gradually moving into our community-based programs since the beginning of the year and proved that she was the best person to step into the TCA position. Ashley Reichard officially became the Urban and Community Forestry Volunteer Programs Coordinator in June of 2016, and several of you have already met her through a number of classes she has already led around the state.

Ashley's new role is slightly more expanded than Valerie's since she is also the lead on a three-year Community Engagement for sustainable urban forest management project, funded by the LCCMR. As a result, you all will be seeing more of Eric North and me working along with Ashley on TCA programs and workshops, sharing the TCA, Citizen Pruner and Tree Steward training and management duties.

To introduce you all to Ashley, I'm going to pretend I'm a real news reporter, rather than just a broken-down, tree-planting teacher (BDTPT).

BDTPT: *What is your academic background, work and life experiences that you feel prepared you for this position?*

Ashley: Let's just say I have an abnormal academic background. I attended the University of Minnesota for my undergraduate degree in Interior Design, with a minor in Urban and Community Forestry. Needless to say, I was one of those students who discovered what I really wanted to do late in the game. So I pursued by minor in Urban and Community Forestry with great inspiration from Gary Johnson. After graduation, I took an internship position with the City of St. Paul in the Forestry Department and I applied to graduate school. Luckily, Gary offered to advise me and I was accepted back at the University to pursue my Master's in Natural Resource Science & Management.

I gravitate toward volunteerism because I have always enjoyed it. Throughout high school, I volunteered nearly 200 hours every year because I think it is very important to give back whenever I get a chance. Throughout my undergraduate career, I wasn't able to do that. I was taking 16-21 credits every semester, holding 1-4 jobs at a given time, and working 30-40 hours each week. That took a lot out of me. But now that I have been back in graduate school, I have free time (and energy) and I have had the opportunity to start volunteering again. Needless to say, I wouldn't want to spend my time doing anything other than working with volunteers and working with trees.

***BDTPT:** What is it about the Tree Care Advisor program that interests you the most?*

Ashley: The thing that interests me the most would be that volunteers who take part in this program act as an educational tool for the public. Volunteers have the ability to share information that otherwise wouldn't be shared and that is crucial for spreading awareness for our urban trees. Before I began taking classes during my undergrad, I barely even noticed them. Now, trees are all I can look at.

***BDTPT:** What do you feel will be your greatest contribution to urban and community forestry volunteer programs over the next three years?*

Ashley: My hope is to see volunteers who have gone through training take on educating other interested volunteers. There are only so many professionals and academics to provide the training volunteers need to go out in the field and more importantly, feel comfortable. But often, they are hard to get ahold of and schedule time with. TCAs could provide the education and field support for other community volunteers when caring for trees that would otherwise be limited.

***BDTPT:** Do you have any ideas for expanding the opportunities for Tree Care Advisors and their roles in Minnesota urban forest management?*

Ashley: Tree Care Advisors go through such thorough training, that it would be great to see them take leadership roles and to become educators like I noted above. This happens informally through volunteer events, but what about having TCAs help train other interested volunteers? Not only do you get to practice what you know, but you can help others become interested in the same content. The Community Engagement project that I am also managing is having training sessions on all things trees. Watering, pruning, planting, monitoring health, inventories, etc. It would be great to see TCAs step in to help train these new community volunteers and to get them potentially interested in becoming TCAs themselves.

***BDTPT:** Any thoughts or ideas on how Tree Care Advisors can become a more visible urban forestry volunteer group in Minnesota?*

Ashley: Once the core course for Tree Care Advisor is complete, TCAs are responsible for finding volunteer opportunities, and those are typically through other organizations. This is wonderful because those organizations do need volunteers and it does bring awareness to the program. But I'm curious if there is a way to have volunteer events hosted or partnered with by the TCAs to appear in public as our own program. The sense of community within a program typically draws me to become involved. Plus, the image of having a support system is a great draw so volunteers don't feel like they are going it alone. The State Fair booth is a great example of this, but I think more can be done to get groups of TCAs together at given times and to be viewed as a connected and committed group of volunteers in the public's eyes.

BDTPT: *Where is your office located? How can TCAs best contact you?*

Ashley: My office is located in 15 Green Hall on the St. Paul campus (Valerie's old stomping ground). It's best to contact me via e-mail, which is info@mntca.org but I also take phone calls at 612-625-2361.

BDTPT: *What's your favorite ice cream flavor?*

Ashley: Chocolate chip, hands down.