



Sonnenfeld, Earhart win 2026 NATCC

ATLANTA, Ga. — After months of training, two North American climbers have been declared the best in the region.

Anna Sonnenfeld, of the Ohio Chapter ISA, and James Earhart, of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter ISA, won the North American Tree Climbing Championship (NATCC) held in Kent, Ohio, U.S., at the Davey SEED Campus, from 15-17 May.

Earhart is the returning champion from the 2025 NATCC, and this is his fourth win as the NATCC Champion. Meanwhile, Sonnenfeld is the first American female climber to take on the NATCC Champion title, with the past champions all being from Canada.

With this being Sonnenfeld's second time competing at North American, she said last year set the standard for what she needed to train more on, and this year, all that training paid off.

"Masters' for me was really wild, getting to climb with all my friends," she said. "And of course, watching James (compete) and learn everything from everyone I possibly can."

Coming off from the Masters' Challenge, Sonnenfeld said she has some things she still needs to work on, but with this being her fourth Masters' ever, she was glad she managed to get all the bells and pull all the gear. Sonnenfeld added she is ultimately thankful to all who have supported her on this journey, from her employer, Madison Tree, to individual climbers.

"I am just grateful for everyone in my life that's helped me get to this point, for all the effort and energy that didn't get wasted," she said.

Earhart echoed Sonnenfeld's sentiments and added that he is excited to see her take this win. They met at the last NATCC, and he knew Sonnenfeld would be tough competition for her fellow climbers as she continued training. Earhart said he also has to give a shoutout to the Davey Tree Expert Company for opening up the SEED Campus for this competition, as it has been an amazing facility and venue.

Going into the Masters', Earhart said he was nervous, as always, but as part of his training for this, he had practiced managing those pre-competition nerves. Earhart has been training regularly for the NATCC since 2001, and his first one was in 2004. He said he trained especially hard for this one, and it was so sweet that the work had paid off.

"The older I get, the more I realize I have fewer ahead of me than behind me, so they mean a lot more," he said. "So, I do a lot of training. I got three kids, and my wife is the only one who makes that (much training) possible. She is just such a support."

This year's NATCC saw 49 male competitors and 23 female competitors. This competition also would not have been possible without the 135 registered volunteers, the event's sponsors, especially the TCC

Global Partner Husqvarna, as well as the site partner, Masters' Challenge and Climbers Celebration sponsor, Davey.

Looking ahead, both Sonnenfeld and Earhart will be heading to the International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC) this fall. ITCC will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S., from 9-11 October.

ABOUT ISA

The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., U.S., is an international nonprofit professional organization dedicated to promoting the importance of arboriculture and educating the public about the significance of trees and the value of their proper care. As part of ISA's advancing the arboriculture profession, it offers the only internationally-recognized certification program in the industry, including ISA Certified Arborist®. For more information about ISA and Certified Arborists, visit www.isa-arbor.com.