

Around the world, climbing arborists promote professional arboriculture and climbing safety through their involvement in tree climbing championships. The ISA Climbing Arborist Spotlight gives tree climbers a chance to share their stories, recognize their achievements, and provide insights into the industry. ISA is excited to launch this new spotlight as it is the 50th anniversary of the International Tree Climbing Championship (ITCC).

Originally from Taiwan, Ollie Chen now lives and works in New Zealand. In addition, she is an active member of the ISA New Zealand Chapter. After graduating from college in 2016 with a degree in forest and environmental studies, she began exploring career avenues and discovered ISA. That same year, Ollie became an ISA Certified Arborist® and started learning how to climb.

In 2022, she moved to New Zealand where she became even more involved in the profession and connected with a variety of arborists within the industry. Among these individuals are Steph Dryfhout and Brianna Uivel, both of whom have generously shared tips to help improve her climbing skills.

“I learn from them because my climbing skills are quite basic, but they share a lot,” Chen said. “Some people are more competitive and are not as open with information, but those two are amazing, they really love to share and help out.”

When asked about challenges faced in the field Chen said her age has played a significant role.

“I started climbing when I was in my early twenties, and the environment in Asia is very different from how it is in the West,” Chen said. “You guys learn and then choose what you want to do from a very young age. Compared to them, I’m not certain how long I will continue to compete, but I will do my best.”

Looking back on her journey, Chen said she wishes she had moved abroad earlier so she could have experienced different cultures, environments, and perspectives on arboriculture. Even so, she continues to embrace every opportunity to learn and grow. Her advice to newcomers is to stay open, try new things, and always do their best.