



An Open Letter to the members of Florida ISA from Norm Easey, Florida ISA CEO

March, 2021

Dear Florida ISA member:

The purpose of this letter is two-fold; to update you on 1) our ongoing arborist licensure efforts, and 2) our legislative activities with Florida's new [Tree Law](#). Throughout my career with Florida ISA, we have strived to provide the best training and educational programs, consistent with industry standards, to our members here in Florida. I am very proud of the work we have done and we continue to do. I also realize there is a large portion of the arboriculture industry which yet remains out of reach to the programs which are available. Notwithstanding the great programs Florida ISA organizes, this industry remains one of the most dangerous in the country. For too long I have seen first-hand how even the most routine of safety measures are skipped, disregarded or ignored. This disregard for even the most basic safety measures has resulted in a dismal record of deaths and permanent life-altering injuries for tree-care workers.

As I sit here today, I can assure you we are at a cross-roads as an industry. Given the hazardous nature of the arboriculture industry, our poor safety record, and continued growth of Florida's population, I believe it is long past the time to raise the bar within the arboriculture industry. Further underscoring this point, the Florida ISA Board of Directors, your board, approved a committee to explore and actively pursue licensure for the arboriculture industry here in Florida. The end game is very simple; we believe the only way to increase safety, protect our employees and protect consumers (our clients) is to create a reasonable program, with government help, which will ensure, at a minimum, basic safety, professionalism and business practices are utilized by the arboriculture industry in Florida.

Florida ISA has largely remained out of the public policy spotlight. However, that reality has made changing public opinion and impacting public policy even more difficult. The adage "if you aren't at the table, you are on the menu" is a hurdle which we now face. In 2019, the Florida Legislature passed a new state law which allows homeowners to avoid local permits, fines and fees to remove trees which are a danger. The homeowners free pass is predicated on documentation being provided by an ISA Certified Arborist or Licensed Landscape Architect. The Florida Chapter ISA was forced to be reactive and sent a letter to the governor addressing this poorly worded new law, no response was provided, and the governor approved the bill and the law passed. The reality was we didn't have a voice or presence in Tallahassee, and as a result, Florida law makers did not know we were available to speak for the arboriculture industry. We had very few entry points into the discussion in part because no one in the public policy arena even knew Florida ISA existed. I am concerned that as our state continues to urbanize, bills such as this will become a more frequent occurrence.

Florida Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture

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As you might expect, breaking into the public policy arena is no easy task and even with the best argument, change is not a sure thing. We have, however, taken a few critical steps. Florida ISA has hired a very savvy lobbyist, Mr. Jim Spratt, who has been guiding Florida ISA leadership. Our lobbyist has strongly advised that a change in public policy cannot happen without grass roots support.

This is where you come in. We need all-hands-on-deck to create local relationships and educate our elected officials. We need Florida ISA members who are willing to open lines of communication with their elected officials. We need grass roots; we need business owners, voters, constituents to speak up. We have the opportunity to step up and be seen and heard in Tallahassee on the issues which impact our businesses. There is another adage "All politics are local." Quite frankly, there is much truth to that statement inasmuch as our elected officials will be responsive to their local constituents.

Florida ISA is now pursuing two legislative efforts: correcting the Tree Law language to make it comply with our ANSI Standards; and proposing a bill licensing the practice of arboriculture.

Florida ISA is currently involved in making corrections to the 2019 Tree Law legislation mentioned above, and there has been legislation proposed during the 2021 session using our preferred language. We now need Florida ISA members to contact their legislators in support of [Senate Bill 916](#). In addition, ISA is working through the process in Tallahassee to help our industry improve, your relationship will be critical to that efforts success. For ISA members willing to answer this call to action, we will send you a sample grassroots message and a link to contact your local legislator when the time is appropriate. For any ISA members who already have relationships with their legislators please feel free to contact them regarding SB 919 and we ask that you kindly let us know if you make contact. Use [this link](#) to find your local Florida representatives.

Our efforts to pass a bill regulating the practice of arboriculture has also taken a significant leap in that key members of the Florida House and Senate have agreed that our argument for industry regulation may have merit. The Florida Legislature has agreed to finance a study to help legislators understand the impact and peril to the public and tree care workers in the current unregulated environment. We are hopeful that this study will give us a strong standing when our [licensure bill](#) is proposed in the 2022 legislative session.

Our industry is maturing, I am extremely proud of the progress we have made and continue to make. I also realize we need members, like you, who are willing to step up and help pull our industry forward. Kindly, let me know if you are willing to be part of moving Florida ISA and the industry to the next level.

Sincerely,

Norm Easey

Norm Easey
Florida Chapter ISA, CEO