

Robert W. Skiera

(2/28/1932 – 7/29/2005)

The Wisconsin urban forestry community celebrates the induction of former Milwaukee City Forester Robert Skiera into the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame.

Skiera, one of the most prominent and influential municipal tree managers of the 20th century, was nominated for the Hall of Fame by the Department of Natural Resources based on his accomplishments during a 50-year career in urban forestry.

Starting as an arborist-trainee following military service in 1955, Skiera was appointed Milwaukee City Forester in 1973, a position he held until 1990 when he entered private practice as an urban forestry consultant.

During his employment with the city of Milwaukee, he guided the city through Dutch elm disease, one of the nation's worst urban forestry disasters. Skiera not only directed the removal of more than 250,000 infected trees, but most importantly convinced city policy makers to fund reforestation and ongoing maintenance for a new community forest.

Under his leadership, Milwaukee acquired one of the first computerized tree inventory programs and one of the first tree management programs, both of which are now commonplace. Milwaukee was awarded one of the first Tree City USA designations in 1979, which the city has maintained for 27 years.

Skiera recognized early on the valuable services trees provide as part of a city's infrastructure and the need to develop partnerships not only with citizens, but with policy makers and public works departments. His efforts led to the incorporation of trees into construction and maintenance specifications which set the standards for municipal tree protection efforts.

Urban forestry education was one of Skiera's passions, not only for himself and his staff, but for those at every level. He served as an advisor on urban forestry to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and the Milwaukee Area Technical College where he was involved in initiating the program and served as an adjunct instructor. He played a major role in the development of Havenwoods, an environmental education center in Milwaukee and Wisconsin's first urban state forest. Bob was equally effective sharing his knowledge and passion for urban forestry with citizens, school children and always had time for students aspiring to urban forestry careers.

Skiera was a major force in the profession of urban forestry. Most active in the Wisconsin Arborist Association, he served as President in 1979 and was awarded Distinguished Service in 1986 and honorary Life Member in 1991. His national reputation for leadership advanced him to presidency of the International Society of Arboriculture in 1988. Skiera was also actively involved with American Forests, the nation's oldest conservation organization, serving on its board of directors and as Vice President.

Skiera served as a charter member of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council advising four DNR secretaries on urban forestry policy and was the first urban forester to serve on the Governor's Council on Forestry appointed by former Gov. Tommy G. Thompson.

Urban foresters throughout Wisconsin applaud the induction of Robert Skiera into the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame and as the "first" urban forester to receive this distinguished recognition.

The Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame was founded in 1984 by public and private forestry organizations to recognize significant contributions to the practice of forestry in Wisconsin. Visit the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame Web site at <http://wisconsinforestry.org/> to see past inductees.

Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame 2006

Robert W. Skiera



In recognition of 50 years as an industry leader and central figure in the development of the principles, practices and profession of urban forest management in Wisconsin and nationally. A practitioner, innovator, lecturer and consultant, he is widely recognized as the most prominent municipal tree manager of the 20th century.

“He used good science as the foundation for a public policy solution and good marketing to sell the concept to community leaders. It's a common approach today, but it's a strategy pioneered by Bob Skiera.”

Gary Moll, American Forests, Vice President of Urban Forestry

“I certainly admired and appreciated Bob's contributions to the Governor's Forestry Council. His common sense, political acumen and sense of humor were a much needed and useful mix of attributes that helped the Council function more effectively and on a broader playing field.”

Charlie Higgs, Wisconsin Chief State Forester, Retired

“Bob Skiera was the uncontested Ayatollah of Wisconsin urban forestry. His firm grasp of both technical and organizational complexities, unrivalled communication skills and deep sense of dedication to his profession made all the difference in building a strong arboricultural base in Wisconsin.”

R. Bruce Allison, PhD, Allison Tree Care, Inc., consultant, author

“Bob made a lasting impression on me when he spoke at the New York Botanical Garden's 1983 International Symposium on Urban Horticulture. His passion for trees and urban forestry was unexcelled and contagious. ... I know that my conversations with him at this conference confirmed my decision to pursue a PhD in urban forestry rather than architecture.”

Dr. Greg McPherson, USDA Forest Service

“.... Bob [was] always interested in students and he always placed them at the top of his priorities. I don't know if he knew how much it meant to students to have a person of his stature choose to spend time with them, but he always knew that our new, young members were the future of our profession.”

Dr. Robert Miller, UW-Stevens Point, Professor of Urban Forestry, Retired

“On sports teams there are few very special people over the decades that when they depart they leave a big hole. In response and respect the teams retire their numbers. This gives recognition that they will never be fully replaced. If the Arboricultural industry had numbers, we would be retiring Bob's.”

Dave Scharfenberger, Board Certified Master Arborist, Wachtel Tree Science & Service, Inc.