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Photos by TC Mazar

What Pete Nieves-Sosa, owner of The Crane Man, Inc. and his people have created with the Crane Safety Climber School (CSCS) isn't just an annual hands on training event. It's a community of climbers, operators, mentors, friends and colleagues that maintain, evolve and advance the safety culture and knowledge base of crane assisted arboriculture operations for the current and future generations of practicing arborists.

And anyone that knows Pete realizes very quickly that he is a master of putting the right people in the right positions so that everyone succeeds.

The pool of instructors includes the likes of Rob Thigpen, Jim Roach, Mike Teti, Derrick Martin, Daniel Lawton, Michael Livingston, Dave Swirdsding, Shawn Rowley, Rick Yoos, Frazier Lay, Chris Girard, Alex Gullede and Stephen Connally to name a few. Each instructor brings a wealth of accolades and knowledge from years of experience in the tree care industry, as climbers, crane operators and business owners. This specialized pool of experience offers some of the best coaching climbing arborists can receive for crane assisted tree work operations.

At this year's 2019 event, students gathered from all over North America at the site of The Inn at Villanova in Wayne, PA.

Longtime instructor Mike Teti admits that there is a significant amount of down time to take advantage of during the field operations and in between each climbing student turn. But

that's actually one of the perks of the class.

"There's a lot of time spent just for banter...And because the guys in the tree aren't being rushed through their thing, everybody is involved, everybody is engaged."

There is a personal touch and highly critical process of analyzing the application of things like rigging and job-site layout under the real time pressure that a live jobsite offers. With each application of the rigging hardware, chain saw cut and crane pick, students, operators and instructors can discuss what worked and what didn't. And most importantly, what could be done better.

I watched with other students a twenty five hundred pound piece of Tulip Poplar lowering down out of the sky on the cable of Dave Swirdsding's fifty-ton crane. Our break-out group included myself, Lawrence Shultz, Tony Martinez, Carlos Pulido, Jim Roach, Rob Thigpen and Chris Girard and we discussed in detail the rigging of each piece, searching for any imperfections to point towards, hash out and possibly re-engineer. This constructive criticism throughout the groups workshops the potential to create perfect static crane pick.

Classroom time is combined with the fieldwork to establish and solidify different core concepts specific to working with cranes and trees. Hardware and its proper configurations and ratings are well explored in a relaxed, interactive classroom atmosphere. Job Site Analysis briefings, work positioning,

CRANE SAFETY CLIMBER SCHOOL

ANNUAL CRANE TRAINING, WAYNE, PA, USA

by TC Mazar

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measuring and setting up a work zone properly for a crane, as well as the applied physics and capabilities of the crane itself are all topics covered against the backdrop of an engaging PowerPoint presentation.

Climbing arborist Tony Martinez from CP and Sons Tree Service travelled all the way from Los Angeles. That's a long distance, but the means certainly justifies the ends.

"Crane removals for me are new," Martinez said. "I'm definitely getting more experience for myself as well as operators over there. There's not many experienced operators where I come from. So I can hopefully take the knowledge I learn here back to L.A."

Carlos Pulido, owner of CP and Sons Tree Service in Los Angeles, also made the trip with his apprentice Tony. "In LA we don't have a lot of crane companies that work with trees. We came to learn how to use the crane slings, to figure out different techniques like the V-cut and shelf cut."



There was an array of worksites setup throughout the property. A mix of mobile hydraulic cranes and articulated knuckleboom cranes dotted the property of the Inn working on Ash, Beech and Tulip poplar trees to name a few.

For the first rigging demonstration on day one students stood just outside the work zone of legendary operator Michael Livingston's worksite as he lifted climbing instructor Derrick Martin into the spreading crown of a large Ash tree. Martin rigged the piece with a balanced application of some of the

crane climber's most essential tools: dead-eye rope slings, half hitches, cow hitches, and one rope sling extended on the fly with a traditional round sling and shackle. Over the Sena Bluetooth connection, Livingston and Martin communicated directly. After Martin placed a loud shelf cut and stored his saw, Livingston hoisted his cable and the large trident of Ash came off the cut silent and smooth.

Instructor Chris Girard from New Hampshire has plenty to say about his positive experiences with Crane Safety Climber School. "I could go on for hours," Girard boasted with pride.

"One of the best things about this particular workshop are the instructors that are here. You get them up in the tree, you get them on the ground and everything is always gone over...everything is explained clearly."

Arborist and volunteer Kevin Lay, son of Instructor Frasier Lay, explained how powerful the community of arborists is for the student experience in general.

"It's just the wealth of knowledge between everyone," Lay said. "You have so many guys from so many different areas, and you really get a chance to talk with everyone; not even just the crane stuff, just climbing in general. You get tons of different knowledge."

Instructor Shawn Rowley from New Jersey admitted about CSCS that it's "the furthering of our knowledge and the furthering of our industry and trade and its such a safer way to do things and that's what keeps you coming back. You're preventing injuries, you're preventing hazards."

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“This is a game-changer,” Rowley said.

At 64 years old, CSCS student Pat Lewis is absolute proof that you can still teach an old dog new tricks.

Lewis admitted that learning how to climb safer was his main objective for this year’s class.

“This is the first time I’ve been on a knuckleboom crane and it’s pretty interesting,” Lewis said. “Since 1979 I’ve been working cranes...and I came here to also learn some of this spider-leg rigging that they’re getting into with multiple attachments.”

Lewis laughingly quoted the Beatles as he left me, “will you still need me, will you still feed me when I’m 64.”

Absolutely, Pat.

Arborist and class instructor Alex Gulledge from Colorado said that “It’s a great industry and niche that we’re in with these



Knucklebooms, and especially the knucklebooms with the grapple saw. It’s such a tight-knit community.”

Gulledge came to the CSCS several years ago in preparation to learn the ins and outs of knuckleboom operation before his newly ordered unit arrived to his company.

“My first experience here definitely changed my outlook on the industry for the better,” Gulledge said.

Stephen Connally from Adaptable Aerial Solutions in Virginia, is no newcomer to the arborist industry, but like Gulledge, he is the new owner of a knuckleboom crane which he drove to PA all the way from Virginia to volunteer his time and equipment as an instructor and operator this year.

“The first year I came up to crane school I saw Rick Yoos’ knuckleboom,” Connally said. Although not initially very impressed, Connally admitted his perspective changed by his second course enrolment.

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“The second year I came back I really looked at it long and hard and I started to see the applicability of it and how maybe if I can make it work this would be a source for me to be an independent contractor with no employees... I figured I’d take a chance and it worked out great. I’ve been booked solid since I bought it.”

Connally did admit that just like any great tool though, his truck does have it’s limits. Growth is on his horizon so that he can siphon through his market and retain quality clients. Most importantly, he feels deeply indebted to CSCS for the doors it opened in his own life.

“This class made such a difference in my career. I feel so passionately about this program I just had to give something back...I’m pretty lucky they let me bring the truck up here and participate in this class.”



At the close of the first night I watched as dusk settled in against large cumulous clouds brilliantly haloed by the setting late-April sun, groups of arborists chatting, analyzing, joking and reminiscing. A long, twelve-hour day is nothing new to this group of students, operators and instructors, not even with bad weather on the horizon. The loud roar of a diesel engine throttles up and the whine of a loaded hoisting cable brings the last of the days wood up, over and down to be sent through the rolling feeder wheels of a dual axle chipper. It is a heavy steel symphony. You look around and everyone really is engaged deeply with something or

someone. No one can really get enough of this stuff.

“This sucks we have to wait another year to do this again,” Teti said.

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