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The ISA Texas chapter hosted its 36th annual Texas Tree Climbing Championship May 18-19 at a new location— Getzendaner Park in Waxahachie. Getzendaner is a beautiful park with huge bur oaks, pecans, red oaks, cedar elms, and even an occasional black walnut. Much like the competition it hosted, the park had a sampling of the best Texas has to offer.

Chapter volunteers arrived in Waxahachie on Tuesday to begin preparing the park for the competition— pruning the massive trees and setting up a challenging and exciting course to test the mettle of the state’s best climbers along with several out-of-state competitors. On Thursday, the chapter hosted a bilingual workshop on stationary rope climbing systems. Led by Phil Kelly and Carlos Rodriguez of North American Training Solutions, the class focused on how to get the most out of the latest techniques and devices to make the work of production arborists safer and more efficient.

The event kicked off on Thursday night at the gear check where all the competitors brought their gear to be checked for safety. For our volunteers, who began their day at 7am, the 5-9 pm gear check capped off an exhausting but fruitful day.

The preliminary events began early Friday morning, and competitors and volunteers alike worked diligently to have a safe and exciting competition. Over the years, those of us who have volunteered have grown accustomed to seeing the same determined faces working their hardest to be crowned champion. This year, however, it was equally exciting to see a new crop of Texas climbers. Our industry continues to grow in the state and continues to attract some of the toughest, most talented men and women Texas has to offer. Seeing them gather at the championship was proof positive of the values that continue to persist in our industry—toughness, determination, a dedication to mastering our craft, and, above all, a commitment to safety.

The course this year was as exciting as the competition. The work climb was in an 80-plus-foot pecan that tested the competitors before they even rang the starting bell, which was located 70 feet in the crown of the tree. Designed to be a fast, compact climb, the event showcased the competitors' skill and we saw some incredible climbs.

The belayed speed climb, a mad 50-foot scramble, is a true test of sheer determination and stamina. This beautiful bur oak climb, conceived and put together by longtime speed climb head judge Chris Brewer, was one of the toughest and most exciting we have seen.



This year's work climb tree was a massive pecan. Photo by John Giedraitis.



2017 TTCC Champion Jimmy Prichard is ready to climb. Photo by John Giedraitis.



The ascent event was new to TTCC this year. Here Keith Cooper demonstrates that his know it secure for judges AJ Thibodeaux and Guy LeBlanc. Photo by John Pinney.

The new techniques and devices taught at the workshop were on display in the competition as well. The new ascent event, which has replaced the footlock event, was a hit as climbers used myriad systems to outpace each other in a grueling 63-foot climb. In the end, the victor in the new event was Jimmy Prichard, with a blistering time of just over 17 seconds! A special shout-out to the ascent team is warranted; running a new event is a true challenge, and its success is a testament to the intelligence and dedication of the entire team. In particular, AJ Thibodeaux (head judge) and Guy LeBlanc (head technician) ran a tight ship and set the bar high for future events.

Once again, the championship saw a growing women's division, with Star Quintero and Amanda Hancock returning to compete, and newcomer Tiana George joining the fray. All three had an excellent outing with Star finishing the preliminaries in fifth place overall! It has been a pleasure to watch these women compete and become stronger climbers every year.

Kirbie Houser and Kirsten Schneider once again led the scoring team and their contribution cannot be overstated. The event literally would not happen without the amazing work they do.

At the end of Friday, the scores were tallied, and the competitors who would advance to the Masters' Challenge were announced. In the men's division, Miguel Pastenes and Jimmy Prichard returned to the ring along with newcomers to the Masters' Challenge Keith Cooper and Andrew Machuca. In the women's division, Star Quintero and Amanda Hancock were set to challenge each other and the course.

The Masters' Challenge was held in a spectacular bur oak and challenged the competitors not only with height, but also with an equally intimidating spread Low rope angles, long limb walks, few good tie-in points, and a thick canopy put all of their skills to the test in a 25-minute and 30-second crucible.

Miguel Pastenes had a beautiful climb and finished with just a few spare minutes while Jimmy Prichard had one of the most nail-biting finishes in recent memory. Hitting the ground with just thirty seconds to spare, it looked like he would get in just under the wire when the line he was retrieving tied itself hopelessly around a branch, running out the clock. Fortunately for the Masters' team, Judge Nicolas Martinez was able to use his impressive throwline skills to untie the rope from the ground! Keith and Andrew had excellent runs as well, showcasing their increasing skills.

Both Star and Amanda worked the tree hard and had impressive runs also, timing out before finishing the course but showing the assembled crowd what talented and determined climbers they have become.

Top finishing out-of-state competitor Ephraim Taylor also showcased his skill on the course. As a past competitor on American Ninja Warrior, Ephraim was a joy to watch and had a nail-biting run as well, running out of time just before ringing the final bell.

In the end, it was Miguel and Star who took home the top honors this year. With impressive preliminary rounds and skillful Masters' performances, their victories were hard-earned and well deserved!



Matthew Klippstein explains the rules of the Husqvarna chain saw competition. Photo by John Giedraitis.



This year, competitors, volunteers, and spectators were entertained by Bandsaw at an after party hosted by Howard Gee and TFS Urban Forester Mike Sills of Waxahachie. Photo by Micah Pace.

This year, the Spirit of the Competition award went to Star Quintero in recognition of her positive attitude, dedication to her craft, focus on safety, and her selfless optimism throughout the competition. Star truly embodies what this event is all about!

Volunteer of the Year was awarded to Kirsten Schneider in recognition of her years of volunteer service and her tireless dedication to the event.

The Climbing Championship is the chapter's biggest event focused solely on climbers and it continues to be an amazing experience for those who compete, volunteer, and come to cheer the climbers on.

Two years after taking the reins of the event from the venerable Kevin Basset and Guy LeBlanc, Markus Smith and I have once again walked away with pride from a safe and exciting event with a renewed drive to provide the climbers of Texas one of the premiere championships in the world.



Each contestant was required to have his gear checked the night prior to the competition. Photo by John Giedraitis.

The following page contains the 2018 Winner's Chart! Our very own, Miguel Pastenes took top place and is listed at the top of the chart!

NO	COMPETITOR	CHAPTER	OVERALL PRELIM RANKING	PRELIMINARY TOTAL (200 max)
27	Miguel Pastenes	Texas	1	154.28
15	Jimmy Prichard	Texas	2	128.54
13	Keith Cooper	Texas	3	128.21
32	Andrew Machuca	Texas	4	127.51
37	Star Quintero	Texas	5	135.67
17	Ephraim Taylor	Oklahoma (Southern)	6	116.86
30	Josh Galster	Colorado (Rocky Mtn)	7	112.70
33	Keith Stoner	Colorado (Rocky Mtn)	8	109.87
26	David Raines	Arkansas (Southern)	9	108.85
5	Eduardo Navarro-Rodriguez	Texas	10	102.03
19	Joey Camron	Texas	11	95.41
2	Carlos Garcia	Texas	12	94.59
42	Thomas Berger	Texas	13	91.55
10	Noberto Mendez-Olmedo	Texas	14	87.33
34	Isaac Schumacher	Texas	15	86.43
4	Jared Obrain	Texas	16	86.19
35	Kelly Hildebrandt	Texas	17	81.68
25	Steve Driskill	Texas	18	80.05
40	Joshua Dickens	Texas	19	71.88
14	Clayton Geer	Texas	20	68.00
21	Daniel Garcia	Texas	21	67.02
36	Federico Sandatte	Texas	22	64.50
9	Fredy Jimenez	California (Western)	23	61.77
3	Christopher Hutchinson	Texas	24	61.00
12	Amanda Hancock	Texas	25	80.83
38	Gerson Henriquez	Texas	26	55.62
18	Matt Twyman	Texas	27	48.94
16	Tiana George	Texas	28	64.90
22	Timothy Chavez	Texas	29	45.71
41	Stan Williams	Texas	30	42.00
11	Nicanor Buitron	Texas	31	41.52
1	Josh Parmelle	Texas	32	41.00
28	Jared Franco	Texas	33	39.87
39	Dustin Goodman	Texas	34	37.00
24	Clint Taylor	Texas	35	35.73
20	Carlos Henriquez	Texas	36	31.33
29	Ronnie Houston	Texas	37	31.33
31	Israel Velazquez	Texas	38	31.00
8	John Sullivan	Texas	39	23.22
6	Alex Benally	Texas	40	17.00
23	Oscar Dorantes	Texas	41	15.67
7	Melvin Salas	Texas	42	9.51