



## **Peter Sortwell adds a West Coast perspective to TCIA Board**

Peter Sortwell, president & CEO, of Arborwell Inc. of Hayward, California, was sworn in as a director on the TCIA Board of Directors during an induction ceremony at Winter Management Conference in February.

Arborwell, a TCIA member since 1997 (Name changed from Arboguard to Arborwell in 2001) serves all of California, offering tree pruning, removal, preservation, installation, plant health services and arborist consultations to contractors, commercial property managers, golf courses, municipalities and estates. Accredited since 2006, Arborwell has 110 employees and gross annual revenues of about \$15 million.

An ISA Certified Arborist, Sortwell is a graduate of the University of Maine with a degree in Plants & Soils Sciences.

He started his career at S&S Tree and Landscape, a Sortwell-family owned company in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts. He later moved west, becoming a district manager of the San Francisco territory for Davey Tree, then general manager for Arbor Care, a Division of Environmental Care, in San Jose, California, before becoming vice president of the Tree Maintenance Division for Valley Crest Companies in Calabasas, Calif. He purchased Arboguard Inc. in 2001, changing the name to Arborwell.

In addition to currently serving on TCIA's Voice for Trees PAC, he is a member of the San Mateo Rotary Club; the Students Rising Above program, which invests in low-income, first generation college students who have demonstrated a commitment to educational achievement and strength of character in overcoming tremendous odds of poverty, homelessness and neglect; and Job Train, which offer vocational training, after-school classes, GED preparation, ESL, internships and more to youths aged 14-21. Sortwell was a member of the then National Arborist Association, now TCIA, prior to his founding Arborwell, beginning in 1993. He served as a trustee of the National Arborist Foundation from 1992-1995, and on the Board of Directors from 1993 to 1997, and received NAA's President's Award in 1997 for his work in developing the former Excellence in Arboriculture awards program.

He resigned his position on the Board to spend more time with his family, as he had two young boys at home at the time and was traveling all week on the job. He says he has more time now to devote to the Board.

“I have some time available and would like to help set the direction of our industry,” Sortwell says.

He brings to the table his experience of having worked both in a small, family-owned business and the large corporate environment. He’s also built one of the fastest growing business in the country, having been named to the Inc. 5000, and San Francisco Business Times Fast 100 five years running. All of this will help him provide direction to the association, he says.

“I have 40 years of experience running small and large tree companies, and understand how to build an organization and differentiate from the competition.”

His being the only West Coast director also brings an additional perspective to the board. “I believe it is important because West Coast tree work is somewhat different from the East or Mid West and the West Coast companies need to have local representation. Many of the West Coast companies do not understand what TCIA is and why and/or how it is different from ISA. I try to explain to them that we’re totally different. So, I am hoping, from a regional perspective in California, that I can help get the word out to these West Coast companies of what TCIA is and the benefits of them belonging to it.”

One way he wants to do that is having local TCIA members, along with the help of TCIA staff, host regional meetings where they can talk with other local tree care companies about what TCIA already does, and what else it can do, for them.

And he does have other ideas for his time on the board.

“I would like to build on the marketing of Accreditation, and begin the process of establishing industry metrics and measurements for standards of learning and education for running a tree company.”

The industry metrics could be used by members to compare how their own business practices measure up, whether it be for how efficiently they are using crews or equipment, how much they are paying workers, how much they are spending on equipment or any number of other management practices.

Ultimately, he says, “I want to give back and to help our industry better itself.”

Sortwell lives in San Mateo, California, with his wife of 24 years, Anne, and his son, Tom, a high school junior. His son Alex attends Cañada College in Redwood City, Calif.