

WATSON FIRST TEXAS MASTER ARBORIST

COLLEGE STATION – Todd Watson, Texas A&M University assistant professor of urban and community forestry, recently became the first board certified Master Arborist in Texas.

The master arborist program, administered through the International Society of Arboriculture, is the highest level of certification and recognizes those who have reached the pinnacle of their profession.

"I just got back from the Texas Tree Conference, and everyone's been asking me what's on the exam," said Watson. "The easiest way for me to describe it is: a Ph.D. can't pass it without 20 years experience, and a person in the field who's had 20 years experience can't pass it without being well read and knowledgeable."

The test has 150 scenario-based questions, according to Watson. Each scenario has a photograph and a description of tree, landscape or arboricultural activity.

He said the test is new, and he was in the first group of people to take it in August.

"I may be the first (master arborist in Texas), but I won't be the last," Watson said. Often people are confused by the difference in an urban forester and an arborist, he said.

"Arborists are tree doctors and a Master Arborist is about as close as we come to a veterinarian for trees. An Urban Forester is an HMO: they manage the doctors and the money," Watson said. He said that an arborist tends to the health of individual trees, and an urban forester cares for stands of trees, often for a city or municipality.

Watson's current focus is to preserve and restore urban ecosystems through technology designed to keep urban forests healthy.

Watson was also recently elected to the board of directors of the society's Texas chapter as an at-large member.

Watson earned a bachelor of science degree in horticulture and a doctorate in plant pathology from Texas A&M University.

For more information about arborists, go to www.treesaregood.com, or for more about the BCMA program, <http://www.isa-arbor.com/certification/boardCertified.asp>.

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