

Contestants out on a limb

Arborists in see-saw battle for Arizona tree-climbing crown

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Climbing trees is more than a childhood rite of passage, just ask the pros. For them it's an art — and a science — all its own.

This year arborists from around the state will bring their ropes and gear Saturday to Mesa's Reed Park for the second annual Arizona Tree Climbing Competition.

"The cream of the cream of tree climbers in the state will be competing," said Juan Barba, a member of the Arizona Community Tree Council Inc., the event organizer.

The non-profit council unites the arborist com-

munity while getting out the message about trees and the role they play in the well-being of communities.

The competition, which drew 400 spectators last year, aims to improve the safety and standards of the industry, promote camaraderie among climbers and give an opportunity to demonstrate skills. There are more than 200 companies in the Valley dedicated to trees, Barba says.

Saturday's events include:

■ **Throwline:** Contestants throw small weighted bags with a small diameter line attached.

■ **Footlock:** Contestants use upper-body strength



Dave Spilsbury

Dan Stevens is Arizona's 2004 tree-climbing champion. Stevens works for Tree Doctors North, a Mesa firm that cares for and manages trees.

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to climb a 40-foot rope, then use their feet to stand on a twist of rope.

■ **Work climb:** Climber goes to four stations in the tree, ringing a bell at each.

"This is what arborists do on a daily basis," said Doreen Orist, ACTC's educational program administrator, who has been in the tree-care industry for 22 years.

The top five contestants in each event will move on to the Master's Challenge later in the day, which incorporates the morning's events.

The Arizona winner will represent the state at the International Society of Arboriculture's Western Chapter competition in California. Winners of the ISA regional advance to the world championships in Nashville in August.

Last year's champion, 23-year-old Dan Stevens, enjoys the physical and challenging aspects of his "hobby and profession."

Stevens works for Tree Doctors North, a Mesa company headed by arborist Ralph Spilsbury, which cares for and manages trees.

Stevens trims, prunes and climbs trees as part of his

If you go

WHAT: Arizona Tree Climbing Competition.

WHEN: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday.

WHERE: Reed Park, 1631 E. Broadway Road, between Gilbert Road and Stapley Drive.

COST: Free for spectators.

INFORMATION: Tree products and service vendor booths, raffles, free children's activities including a bouncer, face painting and supervised tree climbing.
More information:
www.aztrees.org.

workday, and the "competition makes a sport out of it," he said.

Stevens, who lives in Mesa, finished sixth in the Western Chapter competition in 2004 out of 30 competitors, and fifth in 2003.

The ACTC plans a workshop Friday for climbing professionals titled "Climbing with the Best of the West," presented in English and Spanish because many climbers are primarily Spanish speakers.