

## Profiles in Forestry:

### Justine Gartner, CF, Forestry Field Program Supervisor, Missouri Department of Conservation

Justine Gartner, CF, is forestry field program supervisor with the Missouri Department of Conservation, a position in which she directs the state's community forest management program. Among her responsibilities are working with multiple partner organizations to achieve the program's goals; overseeing the program's \$450,000 annual budget; and supervising contracts, including those associated with the Missouri Community Forestry Council and Forest ReLeaf of Missouri.

#### When did you become interested in forestry?

I was in eighth grade when a friend of the family majored in forestry. From that time on I was intrigued by the idea, but it wasn't until my family moved from upstate New York to southwest Texas that I realized how important trees were to me and how necessary they are in our towns and cities.

#### How did you get where you are today?

After completing a bachelor's degree in forest specialization—urban forestry at the University of Missouri—Columbia, I was hired by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC).

My interest was in urban forestry. I knew, however, that to be successful within the MDC I needed to have a broader forestry background. Consequently, I began my employment with the agency as an entry-level forester and spent time learning how to conduct a tree inventory, write plans, mark timber sales, etc. After a year, I was promoted to resource forester. During my third year with MDC, I was fortunate enough to be selected as an urban forester in southwest Missouri, and I spent 8 years in the Bransonarea working with communities, schools, and homeowners, talking about trees and proper tree care. In 2000, I was promoted and transferred to our agency's central office to oversee the state-wide community forestry program.

#### What's a typical day for you?

My job is all about communication, selling the value of trees in our communities, and encouraging people to plant and care for trees properly. Today, for example, I reviewed several Tree City USA recertification applications, wrote captions for pictures submitted by members of the Missouri Forestkeepers Network in our Hunt for Strange and Extraordinary Trees, was interviewed for an article to appear in *Missouri Conservationist* magazine, and will end the day putting together a funding request to help with tree care needs in communities devastated by a recent ice storm.



**Justine Gartner, CF, forestry field program supervisor with the Missouri Department of Conservation, recommends that young professionals develop sound technical, communication, and financial management skills, and good attention to detail.**

#### What knowledge or skills are essential for your job?

Sound technical skills are a must, but so are good communication skills. So much of what I do is educational in nature that it's important that I am able to speak with individuals, groups, and even at conferences.

In addition, I believe good financial management skills and attention to detail help a lot.

#### What is the biggest challenge of your position?

My biggest challenge is changing public opinion—educating decision makers about the importance and value of trees in our communities. Missouri is blessed with lots of trees. Unfortunately, many decision makers feel that a tree is just a tree. No care needed, and so what if you lose one—there are a million more around. Selling the need for proper profession tree care is long-term battle. There's a lot of good research out there to use in this fight. My challenge is getting it into a format that catches the attention and prompts a change in behavior.

#### What keeps you motivated?

I love what I do! In this position I can have an impact—I can do something that helps assure that my daughter will be able to enjoy the many benefits that trees provide when she's got grandchildren. The other thing that keeps me motivated is the positive energy generated by others in the field of community forestry. There's a lot of synergy. People are willing to help each other.

#### What advice would you give to new foresters?

Strive to do the best you can in your classes, but at the same time make room in your schedule to develop leadership skills. Serve as newsletter editor in your forestry club, or be the chair. The skills you'll learn when working with others to get a job done will be invaluable in the workforce.

I would also strongly encourage new foresters to be members of SAF and of their local chapter. Through that affiliation, individuals can access others with job experience and wisdom.

#### Has membership in SAF benefited your career? If yes, how?

I am a certified forester (CF), and the CF program has helped enormously in Missouri. It's a tool that landowners can use to identify trained individuals. In a state where best management practices for timber harvesting are voluntary and where anyone can give forestry recommendations, having a nonpartisan certification program is invaluable.

In addition, I've served in several leadership positions at the state level with the Missouri SAF, including chair. It's an extraordinary experience representing your peers while your state wrangles with issues like a state forestry certification program. The leadership skills that I gained while representing the chapter and at the SAF Leadership Academy have been personally rewarding and very useful professionally.

*“Profiles in Forestry” is an irregular feature created to highlight the various positions within the broad field of forestry and the SAF members who occupy them.*