

# Geist Honored for Record Fundraising for TREE Fund

Steve Geist, plant pathologist for Swingle Lawn, Tree, and Landscape, was honored on November 16, 2013, with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the TREE Fund. The award recognizes Geist's unprecedented achievement of raising USD \$100,000 for research and education in 16 years of riding with the STIHL Tour des Trees to benefit the TREE Fund and its predecessors.

Geist registered for the 2013 Tour with two goals in mind: to ride every mile and to raise at least \$6,700 for the TREE Fund. He accomplished both, and more. The miles were a point of personal pride for the Colorado native, who has ridden every mile of every Tour since 1998, but the fundraising was part of a bigger plan. \$6,700 would bring the total amount he's raised during his 16 Tours to \$100,000. It was a goal worth stretching for.

He had the support of his employer, as he has since the beginning. "I registered for my first Tour in 1998 as a way to see the English countryside from a bike," Geist said, recalling that the ISA Annual Conference was held in Birmingham, England that year. "I had a great time. I made some great friends, and we saw *lots* of English countryside on account of being lost all the time. When I got home my manager (John Gibson, now president of Swingle) declared that the Tour seemed to have agreed with me, and that I should keep doing it. So I have."

Swingle, which services Fort Collins and much of northern Colorado, has been a perennial supporter of Geist's fundraising campaigns. The company gives him time off to ride the Tour each year, and encourages employee support of his fundraising campaign with a gift match program. In 2012, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Tour, Swingle ratcheted up its support a notch, commissioning an original oil painting of the 2012 Tour by Colorado artist Jesse Crock for donation to the TREE Fund's live auction.

"\$100,000 is a sexy goal, and we've been excited for a while about getting to that magic number," Geist said.

Tom Tolkacz, CEO of Swingle, agreed. "Reaching this milestone is reflective of Steve's deep commitment to our industry and love of trees. Swingle is proud to have supported Steve over the years, and we are honored to have him on our team."

Geist likens his fundraising strategy to the osmotic potential of plants: the more you have, the more you get. He built his initial network one donation at a time, asking his suppliers, "how much of your business today came from trees and tree care?" And he contacts every one of his donors every year. "They worry I've quit if they don't hear from me," he said. "I think they like contributing to the Tour; they feel part of something big and important."

The ongoing need for quality research keeps him inspired to ride and raise money. "My work at Swingle depends on research," he said. "Nobody 'got' integrated pest management at first, but research eventually proved its worth, and now Plant Health Care is in everybody's vocabulary. I see risk assessment and soil management as two critical areas of interest right now. Everybody wants a safer workplace, and applied soil research like (The Morton Arboretum's) Bryant Scharenbroch's is key to growing trees successfully in challenging sites."

He's looking forward to seeing the Wisconsin countryside from his bike in 2014. "I guess I'm in 'til I can't do it anymore," he said. "The trees have taken care of me, and I feel the need to reciprocate. Besides, Andy Kittsley's logged just one more Tour than me, so I can't quit 'til after he does. I may not be in the front of the pack, but I like to think it's about the journey—and a beer at the end of the road can really keep you going." **A•N**



Steve Geist