

# Seeds

Department of Horticulture

Volume 21  
2014

## Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

Greetings all alumni and friends! I hope you are enjoying all of the horticulture wonders around you this summer. There is always something new in the horticulture world to be savored, be it a fresh picked tomato from your garden, the glory of a flowering plant, or just the wonderful progression of our seasons.

As always, it has been a very busy year around Saunders Hall and our family is growing! We have just welcomed 21 new B.S. graduates in our spring ceremony. Coupled with seven in the fall ceremony, we have 28 from this past academic year. Colleen Beard, an environmental horticulture major, was chosen to be our outstanding senior for the academic year. In addition, we are proud to have three new M.S. and five new Ph.D. graduates over this past year.

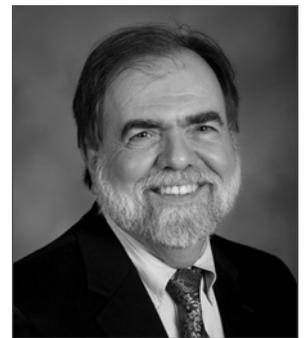
Our Horticulture Club, advised by Barbara Leshyn and Sarah Gugercin this year, continues to be very engaged with the local community. Their annual Spring Fling and plant sale was an outstanding success. Our year began with the ninth annual Garden Gala, the theme of which was "Wine and Roses." Fabulous food and drinks abounded and live music was played by the Bakery Boys Jazz Band. A good time was had by all! We welcomed a class of 106 total undergraduate and nine new graduate students in August, as well as two new faculty members, Megan O'Rourke and Jayesh Samtani, as well as research technician Margaret Aiken (B.S. 2010). We once again kicked off fall semester by meeting of all the undergraduate students, when we explained our curriculum and our overall departmental culture of service and scholarship. All students were given a horticulture T-shirt and a drawing was held for two scholarships. Later in the semester, we hosted the Octoberfest celebration at the Hahn Horticulture Garden. This annual event featured the Sauerkraut Band and food and beverage by the CALS faculty association and the food science and technology department.

The Fall Focus Career Fair returned in October and was very successful. This event is the best chance for students to connect with industry professionals for employment and internship opportunities. Barbara and Susan Day organized a class in Virginia Tech's new Wintermester (between fall and spring semesters) and took 17 students from across the college to tour agriculture in Spain. Class was held every morning where students learned the language of the agriculture topic of the afternoon.

We welcomed Amber Vallotton and Alex Hessler to our faculty as the new calendar year began. Please see the features on Amber and Alex in this edition of SEEDS. Later on in spring, the Horticulture Hokies invaded Ft. Collins, Colorado for the 38th annual PLANET Student Career Days competition and placed 13th overall out of 65 different schools. You can keep up with the year's events as they unfold by receiving our monthly e-newsletter. If you are not receiving it, please let me know ([rharris@vt.edu](mailto:rharris@vt.edu)) and I will add you to the e-mail list. Enjoy this latest edition of SEEDS!

With kind regards,

**Roger Harris**  
Department head



## Featured Alumnus: Joyce Latimer (class of 1978)

Joyce's love of plants and horticulture started very early in life. Both of her parents taught her the joys of vegetable and flower gardening in their family garden in Northern Virginia. Her high school horticulture teacher, Mr. Beam, had a large influence on her decision to go to college and study horticulture. In fact, her first visit to Virginia Tech was when Mr. Beam brought a group of students to participate in a FFA competition. He eventually encouraged her to apply to Virginia Tech to study horticulture and even assisted her in finding scholarships to cover tuition.

The Department of Horticulture looked a lot different during her time as an undergraduate than it does today. The department was located in Smyth Hall and there were about 350 undergraduates majoring in horticulture (we currently have around 100). During her undergraduate education, she served as president of the Horticulture Club and remembers folding pipe cleaners into the characteristic VT to decorate football mums.

After receiving her B.S. in Horticulture, she went on to graduate school at Purdue University, where she received her M.S. and Ph.D. In 1986, she joined the horticulture department at the University of Georgia and worked at the Georgia Experiment Station in Griffin, Georgia for 13 years. While there, her research appointment was in plant stress physiology and she also addressed greenhouse production problems related to growth regulation. She was essential to the creation of the Georgia

Station Research and Education Garden. In recognition of her contributions, a classroom of the first building on the site was named after her in 2008.

Her career came full circle when she joined the Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture in 1999. Indeed, her undergraduate advisor, John Barden, was still in the department when she arrived. She is currently Extension project leader, and Extension specialist for greenhouse crops. Her research in the growth regulation of herbaceous perennials has established her as a leading expert in this area that is so crucial to the green industry. She also serves as an Education Advisor to the Virginia Flower Growers Association.

She has earned several prestigious awards, among them the Virginia Tech College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Outreach Excellence Award for her efforts with the America's Anniversary Garden, a statewide program to increase gardening during the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown.



## Awards

Congratulations to **Barbara Leshyn**, who was awarded the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences' Certificate of Teaching Excellence Award. Barbara developed and currently teaches Spanish for the Green Industry I and II, the first of its kind in the U.S. After Alan McDaniel's retirement, she took over and revamped the Floral Design course and plans to teach an advanced course for those interested in becoming career florists next semester. This past winter break, she led an agricultural study abroad trip to Spain. Barbara is also the advisor to the Horticulture Club, on the curriculum committee, and led a group of students to PLANET, the annual national landscape contracting competition and career fair.



**Holly Scoggins** was awarded the Gamma Sigma Delta Teaching Excellence Award at the honor society's annual initiation and awards reception. In addition to being the Director of the Hahn Horticulture Garden, Holly teaches several courses, including Herbaceous Plants I and II, Public Gardens and Maintenance, and Ornamental Plant Production and Marketing. All of these courses are centered on hands-on learning. She also developed an online greenhouse production course that is popular with both on-campus students and those in the Online Masters of Agriculture Program. Holly is very active on the curriculum committee and led two important initiatives, the new viticulture minor and the dining services student farm.



## News from the Hahn Horticulture Garden – Holly Scoggins, associate professor and garden director

Spring has never, ever been so welcome. Many of the marginally-hardy Zone 7 plants we've been "cheating" with were casualties of this gruesome winter. Along with installing color displays and new specimen plants, there's also been a good bit of cutting back and removal. Onboard to assist us are our summer interns for 2014, Alex Cantwell, the M. Evan Gardener Intern, and Nolan Hudson, the Mike and Susie Hildebrand Landscape Intern.

Our 2013 Garden Gala last June had more than 220 attendees and raised more than \$15,000 for garden operations. Forrest and Linda Fiedler, long-time garden volunteers and supporters, were honored with "guest host" status at the "Wine and Roses"-themed event. The theme of this year's gala on June 14 is "All About the Garden," as we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the best garden party in Blacksburg.

We have a new garden feature in the works – an Edible Landscape Garden. Alex Niemiera received funding from the Virginia Agriculture Council to help create a Edible Landscape Garden, where we'll trial trees, shrubs, and vines that are not only ornamental, but provide some sort of edible fruit, nut, etc. The site occupies the space between the xeric garden and the small parking area, with a patio and seating wall, made with permeable paver technology as a focal point. Robert McDuffie's Landscape Construction students helped with the patio; garden horticulturists Paul Chumbley and Lisa Lipsey are finishing the paths and plantings.

Youth programs in partnership with 4-H are going gangbusters. Led by garden Education and Outreach coordinators Stephanie Huckestein and Michelle Dickerson of Montgomery County Virginia Cooperative Extension, there's a new cohort of Junior Master Gardeners, plus a summer half-day camp of which attendees will benefit from the unique garden and environment-based



Nolan (left) and Alex – our 2014 summer interns.

curriculum. Stephanie has also been working with Belview Elementary students on a regular basis throughout the spring as they create a school garden.

Art in the Garden, a series of exhibits in the Peggy Lee Hahn Pavilion, is enjoying a second year of success. Artists of all genres have been featured for two-month stints, including textile art, watercolor, photography, and more. Visit [www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/artinthegarden](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/artinthegarden) to view a current display schedule. Thanks to the Art in the Garden committee, chaired by Diane Relf, for all their work in soliciting and curating the exhibits.

As always, visit our website at [www.hort.vt.edu/hhg](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg) for updates and information on events, facility rental, and more. Consider helping the garden grow by becoming a member of Friends of the Garden. If you'd like to be added to our mailing list, email Stephanie at [vtgarden@vt.edu](mailto:vtgarden@vt.edu) or call 540-231-5970. Stop by whenever you're in the area to see what's "growing on" – many of you have had a hand in making the garden a better place!

## Faculty

**Megan O'Rourke**, our new assistant professor of sustainable food production systems, joined the horticulture department in August 2013. Currently, her research program examines the environmental and societal impacts of different types of food systems, especially links between agriculture and climate change, ecological pest management, genetically modified crops, the emerging local food movement, and agricultural policy impacts. Megan is a native of New Jersey and holds a B.S. degree in biology from SUNY Stony Brook, an M.S. in entomology and ecology & evolutionary biology from Iowa State University, and a Ph.D. in ecology & evolutionary biology from Cornell University. Before her arrival to the horticulture department, she was in Cambodia for a year, where she was a fellow with the U.S. Agency for International Development working with local farmers on sustainability issues. She also has international and policy experience, having worked with the Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service as the organization's climate change advisor.



## Alumni News

**Wayne A. Mackay** (class of 1976) and his wife Jerrie currently live in Gainesville, Florida, along with their two dogs. After leaving Virginia Tech, he worked as a grower of holiday potted crops in Michigan. He then moved to Maryland to be a grower and eventually manager of a four-acre bedding plant production facility. In 1985, Wayne returned to school at the University of Delaware to obtain his M.S. in plant science and then to the University of Maryland for his Ph.D. in horticulture plant breeding in 1991. His first faculty position was at Texas A&M University, first at the Research and Education Center in El Paso and then at the Dallas Research and Education Center. Wayne moved to Florida in 1997 as Center Director of the Mid-Florida Research and Education Center and then to Gainesville in 2013 as Chair of the Environmental Horticulture Department.

**Diane Ragone** (class of 1977) is director of the Breadfruit Institute, part of the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Kalaheo (Kauai), Hawaii. After graduating from Virginia Tech, she received her M.S. and Ph.D. in horticulture at the University of Hawaii.

**Paul Haden** (class of 1997) has lived and worked on private estates in North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland since leaving campus. For the last nine years, he has been the live-on-site chief horticulturist for Harleigh Farm in Maryland, which is a primary family residence, corporate headquarters, high-end rental, and award-winning wildlife conservation corridor property. The ever-expanding waterfront estate hosts special interest tours and themed, on-site events several times a year. With a staff of about a dozen full-time employees, they maintain over 3,000 acres of woodlands, meadows, wetland buffers, parkland, gardens, mansions, a hunting lodge, and numerous support buildings. As a 24/7 on-call manager, he is responsible for design, installation, and maintenance of all exterior grounds features, production, and display glasshouse infrastructure, pet care, security, on-site event management, guiding tours, hosting guests, and chauffeuring as needed.

**Joey Brinkley** (class of 2003) and his wife Natalie recently moved to Ukiah, California. Joey has taken a job as vineyard manager for Bonterra wines, which is part of the Fetzer family of wines that strictly adheres to the organic and biodynamic aspect of wine production. Joey and Natalie were blessed with the arrival of newborn Isaiah Coles Brinkley on Oct. 8, 2013.

**Alec Selz** (class of 2008) was recently promoted to AA Sales Trainee in the Davey Tree Co. of Richmond, Virginia territory. Alec began his career with Davey in 2006 as a summer college intern in the Richmond office. After graduating from Virginia Tech, Alec returned to the Richmond office as a plant health care trainee in June of 2008. Alec was then promoted to the rank of Sales & Service Technician A. He is an I.S.A Certified Arborist and a Virginia State Certified Horticulturalist. He is also a graduate of the Davey Institute of Tree Science. Alec resides in Powhatan, Virginia with his wife, Sarah and their two young girls, Emma and Abby.

### In Memoriam

Mr. David Bruce Nash (class of 1974) passed away on February 15 after a long battle of Guillian-Barre Syndrome. He was 62. After graduating from Virginia Tech in 1974, he was a florist at Alexandria Floral and part-time instructor at Northern Virginia Community College until 2003, when he was appointed as a full-time faculty at the college. He was an extremely talented florist and an enthusiastic and popular instructor who freely gave his time to assist students.

## SEND US YOUR NEWS

We are always glad to hear what horticulture department Alumni are doing. So please send us news about your employment, achievements, special occasions, or your dog eating part of the couch (OK, skip the dog news). We will post your info (unless you do not wish it to be posted) in the next SEEDS Newsletter. Send your news to Alex Niemiera: [niemiera@vt.edu](mailto:niemiera@vt.edu).



Faculty from page 2

**Alex Hessler** is a new instructor in the department who teaches a course on organic vegetable production. He also directs the Sustainable Food and Farming Systems Project, a collaboration between the Department of Horticulture and Virginia Tech Dining Services to promote experiential education in food and agriculture through a six-acre campus vegetable garden. The garden, located at Kentland Research Farm, grows a diversity of fruits and vegetables that are served in campus dining halls. He is interested in field-based approaches to teaching practical vegetable crop production skills, including student farms, apprenticeships, and incubator farm programs. He has an M.S. in horticulture from the University of Kentucky and a B.S. in resource conservation from the University of Montana. His past research projects have focused on novel strategies for reduced tillage, cover cropping, and mechanization in small-scale vegetable production systems. He is originally from Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



**Amber Vallotton** joined our department this past December as the Fresh Produce Food Safety Team coordinator. She supports statewide on-farm food safety programming by training and assisting Virginia Cooperative Extension agents in their delivery of education to produce growers, including the development of educational food safety materials. As the interface between research and Extension outreach, she also is strengthening capacity through the formation of a statewide on-farm food safety advisory group, the development of a multi-user website, the creation of a marketing plan, and the exploration of funding opportunities. Before she joined the Horticulture Department, she was a horticulture Extension agent in Rockingham, Virginia. She received her B.S. and M.S. from New Mexico State University.



## Staff

**Margaret (Tackett) Aiken** assumed the role of manager of the floriculture and greenhouse production program in July 2013. Margaret graduated with her B.S. in Horticulture from our department in 2010 and comes back to us after three years in the propagation division of Van Wingerden International in Asheville, North Carolina.



## Retirements

**Joyce Shelton** was hired by the department in May 1971. As a program support technician, she provided support to many research, Extension, and teaching faculty during her employment. She was also the administrator of the department's graduate program and served as one of the department's fiscal technicians. In addition, she served as editor of the SEEDS newsletter. Joyce was a recipient of the President's Award for Excellence in 2006. She retired from the department after 41 years of service on July 1, 2012. She continues to attend Model A events and enjoys cooking. Contact her at [joyce@vt.edu](mailto:joyce@vt.edu).



**Suzanne Piovano** retired from her position as research specialist in Richard Veilleux's active research program in 2012. She was a significant presence for 26 years on numerous and fundamental jobs in the lab, greenhouse, and field. Her job ran the range of supervising and training student help, maintaining records for research projects, ordering supplies, assisting with teaching labs, maintaining potato stock in tissue culture, organizing needed lab equipment, repairs, and more. Over the years, she interacted with many graduate students, part-time help, and scientists on postdocs or sabbatical leave that passed through the area of plant genetics in our department. She will be remembered by all of them for her essential and helpful contributions to their work. She is a very talented knitter and sells her scarves, cowls, and shawls to raise funds for the Floyd County Humane Society, where she also volunteers.



**Margaret Merrill**, the college librarian and office neighbor in Saunders Hall, is retiring this summer after 17 years at Virginia Tech! We appreciate all of her help with tracking down hard to find publications and all that she has done to enhance information literacy.



# Seeds

Department of Horticulture

Send information to:

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## Alumni Information Form

The Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture would like to have current information on your activities and accomplishments. Please complete this form to let us know where you are and what you're doing.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Year and Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Current Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

News about Yourself (attach additional pages as needed): \_\_\_\_\_

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