

Seeds

Department of Horticulture

Volume 20
2013

Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

Greetings alumni and friends!

I hope that this 2013 edition of Seeds finds everyone in good spirits and enjoying the horticultural bounty of summer. As always, it has been a very busy year around Saunders Hall.

We have just welcomed 10 new graduates into our alumni family. This graduating class was comprised of stellar students, five of whom graduated with honors.

Our student body is vibrant and our overall numbers are increasing. We expect to have a just over 100 students in our program this fall semester. The Horticulture Club, advised by Barbara Leshyn and Velva Groover this year, continues to be very engaged with the local community and the plant sale this past spring was perhaps the best ever. The outstanding weather certainly helped!

A whirlwind tour of this past year begins with our 8th annual Garden Gala festival at the Hahn Horticulture Garden last June. The "Key West" theme was very popular with the approximately 225 attendees as they enjoyed a bit of "Margaritaville" in the garden. Fabulous food, drinks, and entertainment by The Key West Band made it an evening to remember – all capped by an exciting live auction. Gala ticket sales, sponsorships, and auction proceeds raised more than \$17,000 in funds for the Hahn Horticulture Garden. The theme for this year's event was "Wine and Roses" and featured Virginia Wines.

We once again kicked off fall semester with a department-wide meeting of all undergraduate students, faculty, and staff where 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. A few days after the

meeting we held a department-wide BBQ at the Hahn Pavilion. This is an old Horticulture department tradition that was held for years at the old Horticulture farm (currently where Lowe's is located in Christiansburg) and then moved to Kentland Farm. A strategic planning faculty retreat followed in October where we discussed our plans for the next five years. A strategic plan later emerged (see our web site at www.hort.vt.edu) that indicated our three main focus areas: genomics, green Industry, and food, supported by undercurrents of ecosystems, health, and environment.

In January we had a great visit by 11 recent alumni (2008-2012). Despite the snow storm, the group held a very informative meeting with our students where they candidly discussed life after graduation. In the spring, 28 horticulture and agricultural technology students traveled to Auburn, Ala., for the 37th annual PLANET (Professional Land-care Network) Student Career Days competition. Over 60 colleges and universities were represented in 27 indoor and outdoor events. This year the team from Virginia Tech placed 16th overall. You can keep up with the year's events as they unfold by receiving our monthly e-newsletter. If you do not currently receive it, please let me know (rharris@vt.edu) and I will add you to the e-mail list.

With kind regards,

Roger Harris
Department head



Featured Alumnus: Rich Marini, Ph. D. 1981

Dr. Rich Marini earned his Ph.D. from the Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture in 1981. His mentor and graduate advisor was John Barden (Professor Emeritus); Rich and John have remained good friends till this day. Rich's wife, Michelle, also graduated from the Department of Horticulture (M.S. degree in 1981). Following graduation, Rich and Michelle moved to NJ where he was on the faculty at Rutgers University until 1985. He then joined the horticulture faculty at Virginia Tech serving the research and Extension missions in the area of tree fruit physiology. In 1985 he was promoted to associate professor and to professor in 1997. During this time, Michelle was a faculty statistical consultant in the Department of Statistics. The next chapter of Rich and Michelle's life has been spent in University Park, Pa. Since 2004, Rich has served as professor and head of the Plant Science Department at Penn State University. His major areas of responsibility include maintaining and enhancing the growth of programs in resident instruction, Extension, and research, as well as administrative responsibilities for academic affairs, personnel, finances, and facilities. He manages 36 tenure-track faculty members, four instructors, three extension associates, four research associates, numerous staff, 60 graduate students, 350 undergraduate students, eight postdocs, six visiting scientists, three farms, and two greenhouse complexes.



He also teaches some courses. Does he have a chance to breathe? Michelle lets no grass grow under her feet as well. She is a statistician and project assistant in the Center for Childhood Obesity Research in the College of Health & Human Development at Penn State.

Rich has received numerous awards, distinctions, and honors including Fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science, 2005, The Peach Award, presented by the National Peach Council, 2005, Chair of the American Society for Horticultural Science Publications Committee, 2004 & 2005, and Member of the Board of Directors for the American Society for Horticultural Science, 2004 and 2005. He has authored approximately 100 refereed journal publications and over 100 professional abstracts, papers, and reports. He has mentored more than 30 graduate students, many of which have become research scientists. He is one of the most accomplished researchers in the area of tree fruit physiology in the U.S. Rich recently visited the Virginia Tech Campus and received the 2013 Outstanding Department of Horticulture Alumni Award.

Rich and Michelle have two sons; Chris is completing a master's program in archeology at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a Michael is completing his junior year in Music Education at Penn State. Rich and Michelle have a keen interest in dog breeding and training dogs for shows. Other pursuits, as time permits, include gardening, U.S. history, and Penn State football games. The Horticulture Department is certainly proud to have Dr. Rich Marini as one of its alumni.

The Extension Master Gardener program is growing

January 2013 saw the addition of John Freeborn as the new assistant master gardener coordinator for the Extension Master Gardener program which is housed here in the Department of Horticulture. John will be providing general administrative support to the program working with local Extension agents and Master Gardener coordinators throughout the Commonwealth. He has already been working to launch a new Volunteer Management System which is used to track volunteer contributions and the impacts of their work at the local level. He will also be responsible for organizing and hosting the annual Master Gardener College which will see its 26th year in June. Another critical role John will play is in the area of consumer horticulture

publications. He will be working with Joyce Latimer, David Close, and Lindsey Nelson to update existing publications and create new ones, many of which will be available as ePubs or iBooks. He already has more than a half dozen publications in the queue for production, the first of which will soon be released. John is no stranger to Extension, having worked as a county agent in Mercer County, W.Va., after finishing his master's degree and he is no stranger to the Department of Horticulture having worked as a researcher in the greenhouse for Joyce Latimer and Holly Scoggins prior to his current position. John brings a wealth of experience, expertise, and talents to this new position and to the Extension Master Gardener program.

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

It's been another beautiful and very busy spring in the Hahn Horticulture Garden, and we're preparing and planting for a summer filled with weddings, special events, tours, and more. Our student summer interns help with nearly every aspect of the garden and we couldn't do what we do without them. The Mike and Susie Hildebrand Landscape Internship was awarded in 2012 to Anna Rakes, and Izak Khani is the recipient for this upcoming summer. Brittaney Nelson was our 2012 M. Evan Gardener intern, while Alyssa Marks will fill the position this year.

Our 2012 Garden Gala last June had more than 250 attendees and raised a record \$17,000 for garden operations including student worker wages. Steve and Juanita Grigg of Grigg Design were our honorary guest hosts for the "Key West"-themed event. At this year's garden gala long-time garden volunteers Linda and Forrest Fiedler were guest hosts, in honor of their many years of help and support. The gala has evolved into a marvelous gathering of horticulture alumni and community members as well as the best garden party around. Ticket forms are available on our website.

The Junior Master Gardener partnership with 4-H continues to be a resounding success, filled to maximum capacity and led by garden Education and Outreach Coordinator Stephanie Huckestein and Michelle Dickerson of Montgomery County Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Garden renovations over the past year include parts of the shade garden, the xeric area, and a fantastic new "screen" between the central lawn and greenhouses/parking strip, designed by Robert McDuffie. More exciting changes and additions are in the works! Visit our website www.hort.vt.edu/hhg for updates and information on events, Friends of the Garden membership forms, facility rental information, and more. If you'd like to be added to our mailing list, email Stephanie at vtgarden@vt.edu or call 540-231-5970. Stop by when in the area to see what's growing on!



Auctioneer Steven Culver engaged the crowd in a lively auction at the 2012 Gala. The silent and live auction raised over \$12,000 for garden maintenance and student worker wages!

New Faculty

Dr. Jayesh Samtani

Jayesh Samtani has recently joined the Department of Horticulture faculty as the small fruit production specialist. Jayesh is a native of Pune, a city in the western state of Maharashtra, India. He earned a Ph.D. and M.S. degree in horticulture from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His B.S. degree is from College of Horticulture, Mahatma Phule Agriculture University in Pune. Most recently, Jayesh worked as a post-doctoral researcher on strawberries for over three years in the Salinas valley with University of California, Davis in the Department of Plant Sciences.

In his new position based in Hampton Roads Agriculture Research and Extension Center (Virginia Beach), Jayesh is responsible for identifying critical issues facing the small fruit industry in Virginia and finding sustainable solutions pertaining to crop production. He has a 70 percent extension and 30

percent research appointment. Jayesh is working on developing programs that would be of interest and value to the berry growers, Extension agents, and other stakeholders in Virginia and coastal plains of North Carolina. His areas of interests include integrated weed management practices, finding alternatives to methyl bromide pre-plant fumigation, evaluating new berry genotypes and cultivars suitable for field production in the eastern United States, and improving overall crop plant health. Jayesh hopes that his work would help support the currently expanding small fruit industry of Virginia.



Alumni News

Daniel King, class of 2011, has been working for the Brickman Company and was recently promoted to maintenance operation manager in the Chesterfield, Va., office.

Tobias Smith, class of 2003, is the national sales manager for ForemostCo, Inc., an international company dealing in starter plant material.

Jake Browder, B.S. in 2003 and M.S. in 2004, is a soil conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA). Jake also operates Browder's Fresh Pickins (www.browdersfreshpickins.blogspot.com/) in which he owns and operates a vegetable and ornamental plant farm that serves the local farmer's market, restaurants, and other outlets. Jake was awarded the Recent Outstanding Alumnus Award in 2013.

Holly Chichester, class of 1999, has recently been appointed as horticulturist/manager of grounds at the Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Fla.

Elizabeth Bush, class of 1996, works as research associate, senior in the Plant Disease Clinic, a unit of the Virginia Tech Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science.

Carl Thomas, class of 1989, celebrated the 20th year of his Blue Ridge Landscape Business (www.blueridgelandscape.com/). Carl was recently featured in a Winchester, Va., publication noting his contributions and work in beautifying the Winchester area. See chestermagazine.com/the-local-landscape-planting-trees-nurtures-a-community.

Glenn Cook, class of 1978, is owner of Cider Hill Farm in Amesbury, Mass. (www.ciderhill.com/livestock.html). Glenn and his wife Karen operate a business that grows fruits and vegetables, run a CSA, tend to 15 bee hives, and produce apple cider on nearly 70 acres of their 145 acre farm. They also raise chickens (for eggs) and pigs. Glenn is currently vice president of the Massachusetts Fruit Grower Association.

Jerzy Nowak, past Horticulture department head and currently College of Agriculture and Life Sciences international programs coordinator, has been blessed with a baby girl. Jerzy and Dr. Stefanie Hofer (Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures) announce the birth of their daughter, Leokadia. According to Jerzy it is never too early to begin a life of loving plants! The picture on the right captures the first lesson. Congratulations Steffi and Jerzy!



In Memoriam

We were all very sad to learn that Bonnie Appleton died on July 21, 2012. Appleton retired as professor of horticulture at Virginia Tech's Hampton Roads Agriculture and Extension Center in Virginia Beach in 2010. She worked extensively with nursery and tree care professionals and advised over 60 M.S. students during her career with Virginia Tech. Dr. Appleton is fondly remembered by her many students and colleagues.

We are sad to report that Susan Garrison (BS '87; MS '90) recently died after an extended illness. Susan was the head horticulturist with the town of Blacksburg for many years. She leaves us with a strong and lasting horticulture legacy by turning the town entrances into a welcoming riot of color. Susan spread horticulture throughout Blacksburg with hanging baskets and the planting of many trees.

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.



Consumer horticulture is back, officially

Beginning in July of 2012, Dave Close, the state coordinator for the Extension Master Gardener program, assumed some new and additional responsibilities within the area of consumer horticulture. He officially assumed the title and role as an associate specialist within the Department of Horticulture. He will still spend fifty percent of his time overseeing the Extension Master Gardener program, but the remainder of his time will be spent focusing on consumer horticulture for the Commonwealth. In his new role, Dave will be giving attention to youth horticulture programming, working with the green industry, and providing in-service trainings for Extension agents. Relative to working with youth, he will be providing guidance and support to the Extension 4-H program and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization as it relates to horticulture. He also hopes to establish in-service opportunities for middle and high school science and agriculture teachers who have an interest in horticulture. Dave will maintain a good working relationship with Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association and collaborate on projects of mutual interest to them and the Extension Master Gardener program. Lastly, he will offer in-service trainings to Extension agents on timely topics in the consumer horticulture realm, such as community gardening and other topics as they emerge based on identified need or relevance to our constituents. Dave has been a member of the Department of Horticulture since 2004.



Faculty and Staff Awards

Holly Scoggins - Professional of the Year!

Dr. Holly Scoggins was recognized as “Professional of the Year” by the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association at their annual meeting in Baltimore this past January. According to Steve Grigg, VNLA president, “Her work has provided a showcase for the Industry and provided a living classroom. Her work has made the general public, plus others in the academic world, aware of the importance and economic impact of the green industry.” Congratulations, Holly!



Constance Close

Constance has recently taken on the role of human resource specialist in the horticulture department. Her responsibilities include processing new hires, serving as the leave representative for the department, serving as the liaison between our department and International Support Services, and processing wage payroll entry and personnel files.



Constance has a Master’s degree in educational psychology, community counseling. She has spent 15 years as a clinical therapist, working with children and families for many years, as well as conducting crisis mental health assessments. She also develops and teaches child development classes for childcare providers through the Department of Social Services. Constance is married to Dave Close who is the co-coordinator of the Extension Master Gardener Program and horticulture department’s associate specialist in the area of consumer horticulture. Constance and Dave have four beautiful daughters.

Seeds

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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): _____

