

Fall 2006, Volume 14, Number 1

# Seeds

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

*Jeffrey Miller*

Our alumni spotlight for this year shines on Mr. Jeffrey Miller, Virginia Tech Horticulture graduate of 1970. Jeff was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and was raised on a dairy farm in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Jeff is married to Sandra Moore from Christiansburg, Virginia, a 1979 Horticulture graduate of Virginia Tech. They have two children, a daughter Gwendolyn and a son Jason. Jeff currently serves as Executive Director of the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association (VNLA); Executive Director of the Virginia Green Industry Council; Executive Director of the Virginia Christmas Tree Growers Association; and President of Horticulture Management Associates LLC, a company that designs, hosts, and maintains websites for various organizations and nursery businesses. Some of you, though, may remember Jeff as owner of Laurel Creek Nursery, in Christiansburg, Virginia, or Petals and Palette Florist in Blacksburg where many of you worked during your time as a student at Virginia Tech. His many hobbies include plant collecting, sailing, camping, photography, woodworking, hot air balloons, beekeeping, Internet, and inline skating.



His duties as Executive Director of VNLA include editing and publishing the bi-monthly 80 to 96 page *VNLA Newsletter*, and the *VNLA Guide to Virginia Growers*, a reference of plant availability from Virginia Growers. The *VNLA Newsletter* promotes the industry and provides members with up-to-date information on research, legislation, and education. Jeff also

serves as Executive Director of the Virginia Green Industry Council, a position he has held since the inception of the organization in 1989 (formerly the Virginia Horticulture Council). In these leadership roles Jeff has fostered interactions among many important participants including Virginia Tech; the Virginia Agribusiness Council; the Urban Forest Council; Native Plant Society; Virginia Society of Landscape Designers; Virginia Turf and Landscape Association; Department of Forestry;

(see **MILLER** on back)

## Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

I hope all our Alumni had a successful year and are looking forward to receiving good news from the Home Department. I am very pleased to share with you some of our successes. The *Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion* was completed in June and formally dedicated on June 15 (<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?relyear=2006&itemno=344>). This beautiful structure attracts university, town, New River communities, alumni and professional organizations throughout the state. Our ambitious plan is to make it a center for the expansion of consumer horticulture programs. On September 22, the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Natural Resources celebrated the opening and dedication of *Latham Hall*, a new 84,000-square-foot multidisciplinary research facility (<http://www.vtnews.vt.edu/story.php?relyear=2006&itemno=515>). I am pleased to let you know that our Department secured five laboratories in this new building, accommodating research and graduate programs of six faculty. The labs of Drs. Eric Beers, Jim Tokuhisa, and Richard Veilleux have already been established and searches for three additional faculty (*Specialty Crops Breeder for Bioenergy/Bioproducts*, *Ornamental Plant Breeder*, and *Rhizosphere Biologist*) are in progress. We would like to renovate the vacated space in Saunders Hall and convert it into a modern undergraduate teaching and research facility. The plan is also to develop an undergraduate lounge and dedicate space for

(see **GREETINGS** on back)

## Holly Scoggins NACTA Teaching Award of Merit

Dr. Holly Scoggins, Associate Professor of Horticulture, received the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) Teaching Award of Merit on May 11, 2006. Dr. Scoggins teaches several courses in Horticulture including Floriculture Crops, Herbaceous Landscape Plants I & II, Greenhouse Management, and Public Gardens Maintenance and Management I & II. She also conducts research in production of floriculture crops and has been the Director of the Hahn Horticulture Garden since 2002. One of the central purposes of NACTA is to recognize those individuals whose efforts represent the very best in agricultural higher education. The presentation of the framed certificate was made by Dr. Mary Marchant, the new Associate Dean and Director of Academic Programs for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and her now-retired predecessor, Dr. John Hess.



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## Bonnie Appleton Certificate of Teaching Excellence

Dr. Bonnie Lee Appleton, Professor of Horticulture and Extension Nursery Specialist, was awarded the Certificate of Teaching Excellence from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.



She strives each day to offer her students a personalized educational experience. Her extraordinary success as a teacher can be attributed to her enthusiasm, creativity, and ability to connect with a variety of audiences. Dr. Appleton was recognized for her dedication to teaching excellence and her positive impact on students' lives by sharing her love of horticulture.

Dr. Appleton has been responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing Virginia Tech's extended campus Master of Science degree program in horticulture. Based at the Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (AREC) in Virginia Beach, the program is the only one of its kind in the United States. Under her superior leadership and coordination, the program has enrolled more than 150 students who have taken one or more classes.

## Jerry M. Williams 2006 Virginia Tech Career Advisor

This September Dr. Jerry M. Williams, Associate Professor of Horticulture, was recognized by Virginia Tech Career Services and Provost Mark McNamee for his dedicated service as a career advisor. Over his many years as academic advisor and teacher (Indoor Plants, Environmental Factors, Fruit Crops, Fall Crops Tour, and Senior Seminar), Dr. Williams demonstrated his career development philosophy that professionalism is paramount as a student and as a member and leader in our industry. Provost McNamee also noted a theme seen across the alumni letters sent in, that Dr. Williams does not see his advising as ending at graduation. Congratulations, Jerry, for this well deserved recognition of your caring service to students and alumni.



## Joyce Shelton 2006 President's Award for Excellence

Joyce Shelton, Program Support Technician, has been selected to receive one of the five President's Awards for Excellence. President's Awards are given to those who have made extraordinary contributions by consistent excellence in the performance of their job or a single incident, contribution, or heroic act. Recipients were selected from 20 nominees by a committee comprised of representatives from various sectors of the university.



Joyce has worked in the department for 35 years. She administers the graduate program and serves as proofing editor for major departmental documents, including annual reports and grant proposals. She also serves as lead fiscal technician in the department, and serves as the department's representative to the college's staff association.

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# Alumni News

## 2000-2006

**Constance Hudson Perdue** BS '04 works for Willow Springs Tree Farm. She and her husband John, whom she married in September 2005, live in Salem, VA.

**Ashley Pack Barrett** BS '03 is nursery manager for John Deere Landscapes. She and her husband Simon, whom she married in June 2004, bought and are restoring an historic home built in the 1800's. They live in Winchester, VA.

**Howard Anderson** BS '00 works for Johnny's Seeds. He and his wife Susan (BS '01) and daughter Isabel live in Maine.

## 1990-1999

**Holly Chichester** BS '99 is the landscape designer and project manager of the Horizon Horticulture Group ([www.horizonhortgroup.com](http://www.horizonhortgroup.com)). She accepted this position and moved to Florida in September 2005. She left her former position as Staunton City Horticulturist in the capable hands of Matthew Sensabaugh (Hort '98). She lives in Vero Beach, FL.

**Jerry Carter** BS '94 is owner of Outdoor Environments. After doing design/project management at James River Nurseries, he pursued more extensive construction experience via a carpentry apprenticeship from 2000-2003. In 2004, he started Outdoor Environments, an exterior design/build construction firm. He and his wife Lisa, whom he married in 2000, had their first child in February 2006. They live in Richmond, VA.

## 1980-1989

**Margaret S. Egolf** BS '89 is the propagation manager at Chesapeake Nurseries, Salisbury, MD. She lives in Delmar, DE.

**Jim Monroe** BS '89 owns Greenbrier Nurseries and Greenbrier Seed Co., a new company which sells seed, chemicals, fertilizers, etc. throughout the mid-Atlantic region. He and his wife Jennifer and daughter Madeleine live in Daniels, WV.

**Paige C. Moody** BS '85 (MA from NCSU) is president of Arbor Enterprises, Inc. ([www.arborenterprise.com](http://www.arborenterprise.com)). They moved to a new facility in 2004, and now have 26 acres near the Haw River. She and her husband Sydnee live in Pittsboro, NC.

## 1970-1979

**Pauline Grady Linhoss** BS '78 is co-owner of Type Right, Inc. Instead of raising plants, she has raised children. However, she helps with flower arrangements at church and works part time at flower shops. She and her husband Fredrick live in Shoreline, WA.

**Stephen H. Grigg** BS '76 and his wife Juanita (Acct. '78) are celebrating their 20th year in business. Grigg Design, Inc. is an award winning landscape design/build company. Their market includes the entire northern Virginia region. Stephen and Juanita live in Manassas Park, VA.

**Alumni: We would love to hear from you. Please complete the Information Form below. We'll publish your information in next year's issue.**

### DEPARTMENT OF HORTICULTURE ALUMNI INFORMATION FORM

The Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture wishes 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 \_\_\_\_\_ Degree \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
(Last) (First) (M.I.) (Maiden)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Position and employer \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Name \_\_\_\_\_

News of interest \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to: Joyce Shelton, Dept. of Horticulture (0327), Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061**

## The Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion Dedication

This summer saw the completion and dedication of the Hahn Horticulture Garden's Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion. Part of the Phase II expansion, the 2,300 sq. ft. facility serves as the garden's base of operations, with staff offices and a beautiful multi-purpose room for hosting educational and special events. The building was funded through a generous estate gift and start-up funds from Peggy and her husband, Virginia Tech President-Emeritus T. Marshall Hahn, Jr.

T. Marshall Hahn, Jr. presided over many of the university's most significant 20th century transformations from 1962 to 1974. He later served as chairman and CEO of Georgia-Pacific Corp., the Atlanta-based forest products company. Peggy Hahn is credited with invaluable support of T. Marshall Hahn's presidency with her warm and friendly manner and extraordinary skills as a hostess. She is also a great gardener in her own right – their Ellett Valley home is surrounded by beautiful perennial and mixed borders on which she continues to work.



The pavilion was officially dedicated on June 16, 2006. An estimated 150 people gathered under the lawn tent at the 2:00 p.m. dedication event including the Hahns and their family; Virginia Tech administrators; garden supporters; Hort Department faculty, staff, and students; and local newspaper and television media.

"Much of what the university is today is a tribute to Dr. Hahn's vision and his devotion to Virginia Tech," said Virginia Tech President Charles W. Steger. "... today, we honor (Peggy Hahn) with this new facility which will ever remind us of, not only her devotion to Virginia Tech, but to her grace and beauty and her lifelong love of the land."

"Peggy and I are pleased we could provide for the expansion of the garden and the construction of the garden pavilion, which will add a dimension to ways the garden can be enjoyed and utilized," said Marshall Hahn.

Proceeds from rental of the garden and pavilion for special events go directly into the garden's operating fund and help support our student interns and workers, garden maintenance, and future expansion. Our thanks to Marshall and Peggy Hahn for this wonderful contribution to the garden! For more information, contact Dr. Holly Scoggins at 540-231-5783, [perennials@vt.edu](mailto:perennials@vt.edu), or visit our website [www.hort.vt.edu/hhg](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg).

## Genes That Control Wood Quality

Wood has a multitude of end uses and is the most important renewable raw material. It is the composition of cell types in xylem—the wood-producing tissue in plants—that determines the physical properties of wood and hence its suitability for specific commercial applications.



For example, the thick walls of vessel members and fibers increase the specific gravity of wood, an important indicator of efficiency of different woods as biofuel feedstocks. Additionally, the abundance, uniformity of size and cell wall chemistry of fibers determines pulping qualities for paper production. Through a combination of genomic profiling and informatics, Dr. Beers and members of his research group recently identified several genes that have the potential to control the differentiation of cells during wood formation. They have created transgenic *Arabidopsis* and poplar plants with increased or decreased expression of these genes. With this approach they have shown that it is possible to alter the quality and quantity of wood by changing the expression of a single gene. By characterizing these novel regulatory genes, Dr. Beers expects to contribute to the development of new molecular breeding and genetic engineering strategies aimed at changing the physical and biological properties of wood.

## Landscape Practicum Classes

Over the last 11 years, the Department of Horticulture has offered week-long (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) practicum classes in a range of landscape-oriented topics. The class, usually held the week prior to fall semester, has covered topics such as water garden construction, landscape irrigation, arboriculture, landscape pest management, and hardscaping. These classes provide students with a hands-on, in-depth exposure to topics and projects that are difficult to cover



in the traditional three-hour weekly lab sessions held during the semester. Drs. Alex Niemiera and Roger Harris have developed these courses with the assistance of outside instructors from industry and Virginia Tech. Many of these classes have been open to landscape industry personnel. Student evaluations of the courses have been consistently high, and students find the subject matter and format to be good preparation for their landscape contracting careers. During the fall of 2006 students planned and installed a residential landscape irrigation system.

## Virginia Tech *for Life*

“Virginia Tech *for Life*” means a variety of things to Hokies around the country. It can mean contributing to scholarship funds, recruiting new students to the university, hiring Virginia Tech graduates, serving on departmental and college advisory boards, attending alumni events, supporting athletic teams, and/or keeping a collection of maroon and orange attire in their closet.

Virginia Tech Alumni Relations staff members are devoted to helping you define what “Virginia Tech *for Life*” means to you. We organize a variety of events year round that offer opportunities to stay connected to your alma mater: chapter and club activities, career fairs, college receptions and dinners, college Homecoming celebrations, and class reunions just to name a few.

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) has a very active Alumni Organization as part of its constituency program. The organization exists to promote fellowship and networking among alumni and students and to advance the teaching, research, and extension missions of the College.

To stay current with what’s happening at Virginia Tech visit our websites often. The first step to keeping informed is updating your profile with the university on the VT Alumni Association site, <http://www.alumni.vt.edu/index.php>. You then will be contacted via mail and e-mail regarding any alumni events in your area and on campus. Also, visit <http://www.cals.vt.edu/alumni/> to investigate how you can become an active member of the CALs Alumni Organization. We hope to see you at future alumni events.

If you have questions about the Virginia Tech Alumni Association or the CALs Alumni Organization, please contact Jamie Lucero, CALs Director of Alumni Relations, at 540/231-9666 or [jlucero@vt.edu](mailto:jlucero@vt.edu).

## Bartlett Tree Experts Donate Chipper to Urban Horticulture Center

Bartlett Tree Experts donated a commercial chipper valued at \$15,000 to the Urban Horticulture Center (UHC) at Virginia Tech. The chipper will be used to support various research projects, student instruction on the use of commercial chippers, and gen-



eral maintenance of the UHC. Pictured in photo are John James, Manager of the UHC; Dr. Eric Wiseman, Assistant Professor, Department of Forestry; Mr. Alan Jones, Vice President, Division Manager Piedmont Division, Bartlett Tree Experts; Dr. Susan Day, Research Assistant Professor, Department of Forestry; Rob Springer, Safety and Training Coordinator, Piedmont Division, Bartlett Tree Experts; and Dr. Robert Wright, Director of UHC.

## Latham Hall

Latham Hall, a new 84,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art agriculture and natural resources research facility, located between Smyth and Cheatham Halls on the Blacksburg Campus, opened its doors this summer. The building was named and dedicated in honor of William and Elizabeth Latham of Haymarket, Virginia. The Lathams provided a \$5 million gift to the university to establish an endowed fund to support research in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The building houses CALs faculty from six departments, including Horticulture; Biochemistry; Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences (CSES); Plant Pathology, Physiology and Weed Science (PPWS); Biological Systems Engineering (BSE); and Entomology.



The \$28.5 million facility had been planned for more than 25 years as a solution to replacing aging laboratories in the buildings surrounding the Ag Quad. A new building was a more practical solution to renovating laboratory space, one lab at a time, in the older buildings. The spacious and attractive laboratories, influx of new equipment, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration will help in recruitment of talented new faculty and graduate students, as well as offer exciting research opportunities to undergraduates. Latham Hall is a shining new jewel on campus. For more information and images, visit the website: <http://www.cals.vt.edu/research/aboutlathamhall.html>.

## SNA Awards for VT Horticulture Students

Brian Jackson, a Ph. D. candidate working with Dr. Robert Wright, won second place in the Ph.D. paper competition at the Southern Nursery Association Research Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia this past summer. Thomas Saunders, an undergraduate in Horticulture won third place in the undergraduate paper competition. Both Brian and Thomas, in addition to Breanna Rau and Jamie Crocker, won SNA Sidney B. Meadows Scholarships for outstanding academic achievements. Shown in photo, left to right are Robert Wright, Breanna Rau, Brian Jackson and Thomas Saunders.



## MILLER (from front)

the American Nursery & Landscape Association; and other state, regional, and national associations.

Jeff's activities certainly portray an individual focused on helping others and service to the green industry in Virginia. Additionally he has been a dependable supporter of Virginia Tech horticulture. While operating his two businesses in the Blacksburg area, he was always willing to provide support to the academic programs by hosting field trips and sharing resources when appropriate. He has also been supportive of funding for special projects, student scholarships, and research grants through the VNLA. In recognition of these efforts, he was given the Virginia Tech Ag Alumni Organization Distinguished Service Citation in 1996. Other recognitions include Small Business Leader of the Year from the Christiansburg-Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, 1992; Nurseryman of the Year from the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, 1990; and the David E. Laird Memorial Award for outstanding contributions and service in the field of Environmental Horticulture by the Southern Nursery Association, 1983. Jeff feels that his main strength is working "behind the scenes," providing support, strategic planning, information and budgeting, sales forecasting, and product promotion and management. He is a member of numerous organizations-American Association of Association Executives, Garden Writers of America, Nursery and Landscape Association Executives of North America, Southern Nursery Association, Southwest Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia 4-H All-Stars (life member), Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, Virginia Tech Alumni Association, and Virginia Society of Association Executives. Many thanks go to Jeff for his unwavering support of the Horticulture Department and the green industry in Virginia.

## GREETINGS (from front)

an office for our *Hort Club*. We are looking for partners in this ambitious undertaking.

**New hires.** In January we hired Dr. M. Javed Iqbal, Research Assistant Professor located at the *Institute for Sustainable and Renewable Resources* in Danville, VA. Dr. Iqbal's expertise in plant breeding, genetics, and biotechnology (<http://www.ialr.org/research/Iqbal.html>) will foster the development of new plant varieties with unique characteristics. Jeff Burr, with training in both mechanical engineering and horticulture, became our new greenhouse manager in July.

Undergraduate enrollment kept steady (approximately 120 majors). We have expanded our fourth-year seminar course to include hands-on research experience. This was one of two transition years to a capstone course that will be implemented in January 2008. We also hosted one exchange student from the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, Truro, NS, Canada and hope to have three more next year. For the first time in six years, we had more PhD (12) than MS (5) students in our graduate program on campus. Our non-thesis MS program at Virginia Beach had 8 students, and we became a major partner in the new MS on line program (<http://www.online.cals.vt.edu/masters/>) initiated this year.

We plan to modify the Departmental web site ([www.hort.vt.edu](http://www.hort.vt.edu)). Please send your suggestions to our webmaster Pris Sears ([sears@vt.edu](mailto:sears@vt.edu)). Please also see other Departmental highlights through the text and share your reflections and ideas with the *Seeds* editor, Dr. Robert Wright ([wright@vt.edu](mailto:wright@vt.edu)). I would like to thank you for your continuous support of the Department and hope to see many of you during the year ahead. Have a Happy Holiday Season! Jerzy Nowak ([jenowak@vt.edu](mailto:jenowak@vt.edu)).

*Jerzy Nowak*

# Seeds

Department of Horticulture  
Virginia Tech  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0327

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