

# Department of Horticulture

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## May 2010

Ah - the peaceful sounds of summer are upon us in Blacksburg. Even so, we do miss the hustle and bustle of our students in Saunders Hall! As promised, this month's edition focuses on students. Featured are our new graduates, our ornamental plant production field trip, and some new faces at the Urban Horticulture Center this summer. Among other things, we will feature our new fall-semester students on our next edition (August). As always, we would love to hear updates on our alumni and other friends. Enjoy!

With kind regards, *Roger*

We celebrated our 19 new alumni at a breakfast reception for graduates and family at the Hahn Horticulture Pavilion immediately before the spring graduation ceremony. It was a beautiful morning at the Pavilion - a fitting scene for the soon-to-be graduate horticulturists. Congratulations everyone!

### Graduating with a BS in Horticulture:

Gary Addison

Kyle Ayres

Stephanie Barker

Elizabeth Blecksmith

Rebecca Dabney

Michael Gaddis

Mara Grossman

Steven Gunderson

Chris Higgins

Catherine Hrezo

Cole Lusk

Clayton Painter

George Robertson

Brian Saunders

Patrick Snarr

Jamie Stuart

Margaret Tackett

Matthew Tyler

Laurie Whitham

**Graduating with an MS in Horticulture:** Luther Carson, Phyllis Carder, Tremain Hatch

Brian Saunders reports that he will be back for more Horticulture in the fall. Oh—he is also the starting punter on next fall's football squad! Check it out at: [Brian Saunders](#)

### Ornamental Plant Production & Marketing's Statewide Tour - Holly Scoggins

Our senior-level Horticulture course, "Ornamental Plant Production & Marketing" (OPP&M), toured a variety of businesses at the beginning of April to reinforce and elaborate on concepts taught in class. Holly led the crew on a three-day, two-night trip that took them across the state with stops at greenhouses, garden centers, and nurseries. First stop was Saunders Brothers, Inc. of Piney River, for a look at a large and diverse wholesale nursery

with both field and container growing systems. Bennett Saunders took our group through the impressive boxwood fields and the orchards in full bloom; Paul Westervelt led us through the container production, including the annual and perennials houses.



Paul Westervelt, Annuals & Perennials Grower for Saunders Brothers, Inc., shares thoughts on overwintering perennials with the group. (Photo H. Scoggins)

Next stop was Battlefield Farms in Rapidan for a look at one of the largest greenhouses in the mid-Atlantic. Head grower Marc Verdel led the group through countless ranges as well as the bustling potting and shipping areas. A special wine tasting at James River Cellars Winery in Glen Allen, arranged by Mike Hildebrand was next. Winery manager Mitzie Batterson provided a lively overview of the Virginia wine industry, as well as some delicious samples.

The next morning began a visit to James River Nurseries, Inc. in Ashland for a visit with a grower and re-wholesaler with a landscape emphasis. Mike Hildebrand candidly shared his thoughts on the economic downturn's effects on his business. Mike's trademark optimism could not be repressed, though, as he told the class of hopes for this season and plans for the future.



Mike Hildebrand poses with the future of our industry! Left to right: J.B. Snelson, Rebecca Dabney, Jamie Stuart, Laurie Whitham, Eric Jochum, Kevin Harris (Graduate Teaching Assistant), Yvonne Hansotte, John Freeborn (Floriculture Research Technician), Paul Hutcheson, Josh Willis, Mike Hildebrand, and Will West. (Photo H. Scoggins)

A visit to Strange's flagship store and greenhouse at Short Pump provided a terrific garden center experience. The warm and sunny spring Friday had shoppers out in droves. Bill Gouldin, CEO of Strange's Florists, Greenhouses and Garden Center provided background information on the business and then gave us a personal tour of the various departments.



Bill Gouldin of Strange's shares his thoughts on pricing strategies. (Photo H. Scoggins)

After lunch, Bennett's Creek Nurseries' CEO and President Wayne Sawyer met us at company headquarters. Matt Sawyer presented their new "Blooming and Beautiful" marketing campaign, and explained how they're utilizing social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as both educational and promotional tools - this strategy certainly made sense to the students! Next was a visit to Lilley Farms and Nursery for a good look at a field-grown tree farm.

On Saturday morning, the group headed out to Bennett Creek's Isle of Wight 190-acre growing facility. Wayne and John Lancaster, Jr., Senior V.P., took the group through the nursery as they talked about products, growing systems and water management, as well as plans for future expansion.

Everyone reflected on their experiences during the drive back to Blacksburg Saturday evening. Hearing the joys and challenges of our business first hand from these industry leaders made a huge impression on the students. Personal interactions, insights, and experiences gained on trips like this cannot be replicated in a classroom setting, no matter how many slides are shown. A big Hokie Horticulture "Thank You" to all the folks that gave generously of their time (and their amazing hospitality) during such a busy spring season. You made our first excursion so successful, we're sure to do it again!

The new edition of *SEEDS*, our yearly printed newsletter should be in the mailbox of all of our alumni. You can check out an electronic version at: [Seeds](#)

The signature event of the year at the Hahn Horticulture Garden is just around the corner! The theme for the 2010 Garden Gala is "A Taste of the Islands". Come enjoy the steel drums and great food while mingling with the elite (horticulturists of course!). Check out the feature article at: [Garden Gala](#)

Some New Faces at the Urban Horticulture Center this summer - by **Susan Day**, Director

There are a number of student interns, researchers, and graduate students whom you may see around the UHC this summer. I'd like to take this opportunity to share a little about them so you can say hello when you see them.



**Larkin Hottel** -- Larkin is the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association UHC Research Intern for 2010. Larkin will be working about ten hours a week at the UHC and on her own research while she takes summer classes. She is a rising senior and a double major in Horticulture and Agricultural Sciences with minors in biology, Ag Econ, and Leadership and Social Change.



**Dustin Mays** --Dustin is the Urban Forestry Research Intern for 2010, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Forestry. Dustin is from Appomattox, Virginia and is a rising junior pursuing a Environmental Resource Management major with a minor in Urban Forestry. He will be working on an independent research project with Susan Day, Eric Wiseman, and Sarah Dickinson involving the ecology of urban forest fragments while also helping out with numerous graduate research projects and at the UHC. Dustin has volunteered with the Lynchburg Tree Stewards and is also an experienced Barista!



**Andrew Benjamin** -- Andrew is a rising senior from Alexandria, Virginia majoring in Urban Forestry with a minor in Horticulture. Andrew is working with Eric Wiseman this summer on urban forest assessments around the state, but will undoubtedly be spending some time at the UHC.



**Kerry Meier** -- Kerry is originally from Newport News, Virginia and will be a senior this fall in Horticulture. Last summer she worked on the horticulture staff at The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium in Columbus, Ohio. Her favorite activity at Virginia Tech is going to Hokie Football games. Kerry will be working on an independent study with Susan Day focusing on developing hands-on learning experiences for students in Landscape Establishment and Maintenance.



**Katie England** -- Katie is a Ph.D. student working with Woodgro substrate with Alex Niemiera. Her hometown is Seymour, Indiana. Katie has most recently been at Purdue. She has a B.S. in biology from Milligan College, Tennessee, and an M.S. in entomology from Purdue University in Indiana.



**Yujuan Chen** -- Yujuan is from Beijing, China (originally from Anhui province) and is pursuing her Ph.D. in Urban Forestry here at Virginia Tech. She will be working on the next stage of the soil rehabilitation experiments developed by Rachel Layman out at Kentland Farm. She will definitely be out at the UHC this summer and at Kentland.



**Charles de Souza** -- Charles is an incoming M.S. student and will be working with Greg Welbaum this summer on developing research projects with specialty crops.



**George Groundhog** -- George is a frequent visitor to the UHC and will be working on some excavation and carving projects this summer. He is under the supervision of John James, so if you see him out at the UHC working "freelance", be sure and let John know.