

# Department of Horticulture

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*Dr. Richard Veilleux, Department Head*

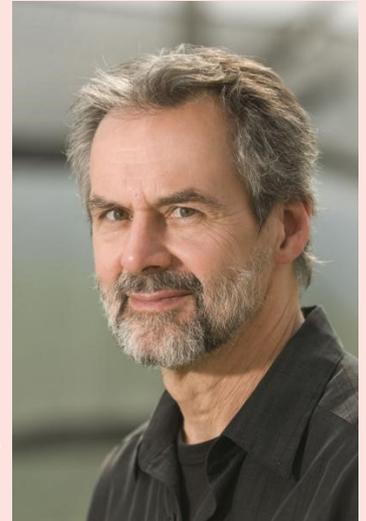
## May 2018

Campus is all spruced up for graduation. Caps and gowns are prominent everywhere, along with proud parents looking for the perfect photo op. Horticulture will have a crop of 15 graduating seniors (listed below) this year. After graduation, they will be embarking on a range of activities and careers. Some will take positions in the nursery industry, others will go to graduate school, one will work on an organic vegetable farm in Pennsylvania, and another one will honor the time-tested tradition of backpacking through Europe before settling. They are a talented group and our pride complements that of their parents.

We are witnessing the early days of the formation of The School of Plant and Environmental Sciences. Mike Evans, our new SPES director, has been in a whirlwind since his arrival on campus in mid-April. He has found a home in the administrative suite on the third floor of Smyth (330), which will remain the center of operations for SPES. Renovations will occur to accommodate additional administrative staff from the soon-to-be former three departments. He's also busy becoming familiar with the various functions and facilities of the three departments, working with the existing faculty and staff to facilitate

the merger, and minimize disruption. A newly formed committee of committees will help with organization, reconfiguring the existing committee structure within the increased disciplines and another new committee will write bylaws for SPES.

We have just advertised two new faculty positions for SPES, one in horticultural crop breeding and another in ecological restoration. In addition, we have advertised two new administrative staff positions, one for administrative assistant to the director and another for office manager. Our horticulture alumni award recipients this year were on campus on April 19-20 for the presentations. This year's award recipients were Alex Johnson, distinguished graduate alumnus (2001), Bin Xu, distinguished recent graduate alumnus (2011) and Jake Shreckhise, outstanding recent undergraduate alumnus (2013) — see photos and write-up on page 2.



*– Richard*

### **Congratulations to our graduating seniors!**

Destiney Ayres

Natalia Bell (Leanne)

Mingyan Chen

Melanie Feldman

Leah Hirsh

Casey Hoff

Elizabeth Howard

Maurice Jones (Reese)

Mikaela Larson (Charleigh)

Ella Reeves

Ava Schwarz

Michael Selander

Laura Stange

Heather Truax

Austin Via

## Daisy Sturgill wins Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ASCFG) scholarship

Daisy Sturgill of Marion, VA (Environmental Horticulture major) was recently awarded the Dave Dowling ASCFG Scholarship. Daisy's scholarship includes a cash award, association membership, and complimentary registration for the 2018 national conference to be held in Raleigh NC in September. She has gained valuable cut flower production and marketing experience from working at Stonecrop Farm in Newport, VA, and hopes to own her own farm one day. Way to go, Daisy!



## CALS Alumni Awards



*Dean Alan Grant, Alex Johnson, Dixie Dalton, and Richard Veilleux*

Alex Johnson (MS 1998, PhD 2001), recipient of the 2018 distinguished alumnus award, is currently Associate Professor of Biological Sciences and Associate Dean of International Programs at the University of Melbourne, Australia's premier research university. He has generated more than two million dollars in grants to support his program from a range of agencies including HarvestPlus Challenge, whose principal donors include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. Alex's main research interest is plant genetics, and the ways through which we can use genetic information to address humanitarian issues, in particular, crop biofortification for mineral nutrition. This emphasis on human health has the potential to impact individuals and communities across the world. His graduate advisor while at VT was Richard Veilleux.

Bin Xu (Ph.D., 2011), recipient of the 2018 outstanding recent graduate student award, is currently Associate Professor as well as Associate Dean of the College of Agro-Grassland Science at Nanjing Agricultural University. Bin handles significant research funds and has been published internationally for research that he conducted with local students in China. Bin has helped to initiate a new international collaboration between his institution and Virginia Tech, where he and his colleagues work to identify strong applicants for funding by the Chinese government to pursue graduate degrees at Virginia Tech. Bin has shown his appreciation and dedication to Virginia Tech through his efforts to create international partnerships across continents and institutions. His graduate advisor while at VT was Bingyu Zhao.



*Dean Alan Grant, Bin Xu, Dixie Dalton, and Richard Veilleux*



*Dean Alan Grant, Jake Shreckhise, Dixie Dalton, and Richard Veilleux*

Jake Shreckhise (BS, 2013), recipient of the 2018 outstanding recent undergraduate alumnus award, is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Horticulture program here at Virginia Tech. Jake has served the undergraduate program in many courses throughout his studies as a teaching assistant. While working as a research assistant, Jake has authored quarterly reports, popular press articles, and made presentations in addition to writing several outreach and extension publications on specific plant profiles. Jake also participates in several local and national organizations. He has volunteered as a judge at the Virginia State Future Farmers of America Convention, as a moderator at the annual meeting of the American Society for Horticultural Science, and a workshop leader at a 4-H convention here at Virginia Tech, guiding the participants in plant identification. After finishing his Ph.D. program in May, Jake will take a postdoctoral position at the USDA/ARS laboratory in Wooster, Ohio. Jake is co-advised in his doctoral program by Alex Niemiera and Jim Owen.

## Extension News

### New video series from the Extension Master Gardner Program!

Take a look at the Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT-rsFK2y4FJDI5ful2JEiw>). We have a new video series created with Eric Day, manager of the Insect ID Lab and Mary Ann Hansen of the Plant Disease Clinic. Our short educational videos feature common garden/landscape diseases and pests, such as Cedar Apple Rust, Seridium Canker, Red Thread, and many others. We have over 10 posted now, with more coming throughout the spring!



*Danyang Liu leading the workshop on growing strawberries in containers at the STEM Discovery Academy in Newport News.*

### Danyang Liu selected for the Graduate Extension Scholar Program

Danyang Liu, a graduate student with Jayesh Samtani was selected for the Graduate Extension Scholar program, a course led by Dr. Hannah Scherer, Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education this spring. As part of the Scholar program and supported in part by the grant 'Comprehensive Urban Agriculture Educational Program to Mitigate Food Deserts in Virginia', Danyang and Jayesh conducted a STEM workshop for elementary-level school kids on growing strawberries in containers. A Workshop was held at Early Marshall Learning Center and at the Discovery STEM academy in Newport News in mid-March, and at an after-school STEM program at East Ocean View Community Center in Norfolk on 11 April, 2018.

Ramon Arancibia and Samantha Taggart attended the SARE "Our Farm, Our Future" conference and presented posters with information generated from the SSARE projects "Living soil for a sustainable future: cover crop effect on soil health and productivity" and "Integrating row covers into sustainable production systems to strengthen the sustainability of specialty crops farmers"

Ramon Arancibia was awarded a VAC grant entitled "Pre-harvest conditioning to accelerate and improve skin set and reduce bruising in potato". The project will evaluate root undercutting and growth regulators as well as defense activators to accelerate and improve skin set prior to harvest. The expectation is to shorten the time to set the skin to reduce the risk of missing the early market window with premium price for fresh table stock potato.



## Publications

Jian, J., M.K. Steele, R.Q. Thomas, S.D. Day and S. Hodges. 2018. Constraining estimates of global soil respiration by quantifying sources of uncertainty. *Global Change Biology* (in press).

O'Herrin, K., P.E. Wiseman, S.D. Day, and W. Hwang. 2018. Identifying a career ladder in urban forestry by analyzing job postings and interviews. *Journal of Forestry* 116 (2): 151–163, DOI: 10.1093/jofore/fvx006.

Samtani, J.B. and Derr, J. Weed Management in Small Fruit Crops. HORT 286-NP.



VT Floral Design students created all the florals last weekend for the UT Prosim Society events. Event work on campus provides the students with experiential learning. Students are involved in the entire process from ordering to designing to delivery. Follow VT Floral design on Instagram to see more student work. @VTFloralDesign

## Hahn Horticulture Garden News

The Hahn Horticulture Garden's first Jump crowdfunding drive, which ended on April 26th, was a huge success! The funding goal was set at \$3,800 and the garden raised just over \$5,100 through the Jump campaign. These funds will be used to manufacture and install a collection of interpretive signs throughout the garden. Examples of sign locations include the edible, spectrum, meadow, shade, and xeriscape gardens. The signs will provide visitors with a variety of information, including details on specific plants, the design intent of spaces like the trident maple alley, and information on environmental benefits of garden elements like permeable paving.



### The Best Garden Party Around!

This year's Gala will be on **June 9th, 2018** at the Hahn Horticulture Garden from **5:30 – 9:30 pm**. Visit [www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/gala](http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/gala) to register or for more information. Contact Lisa at [lilipsey@vt.edu](mailto:lilipsey@vt.edu) with questions.