

Fall 2005, Volume 13, Number 1

# Seeds

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

### *Ed Clark*

Our alumni spotlight for this year features Mr. Ed Clark, Virginia Tech Horticulture graduate of 1977. Ed is President and General Manager of the Atlanta Motor Speedway, and Executive Vice-President of Speedway Motorsports, Inc., which owns NASCAR tracks in Atlanta; Charlotte; Bristol; Ft. Worth; Las Vegas; and Sonoma, California. He represents those of our graduates who did not choose horticulture as their vocation but still consider horticulture as their avocation. Ed is from Keysville, Virginia, and now lives near Atlanta in Peachtree City, Georgia, with his wife Teresa and children Nicki, age 17, and Collin, age 13. Ed worked at a local greenhouse in



Farmville, Virginia, during high school and college and through this experience became interested in horticulture. Ed still uses his horticulture training at the Atlanta Motor Speedway. The Speedway puts great value on the appearance of the facility as the profile of the event attendee changes with more women and a broader spectrum of the general public becoming interested in America's fastest growing sport. He has been known to slip away and prune shrubbery on the grounds. As well, he spends a considerable amount of his leisure time in his own yard and neighbors' yards. Ed says, "I'm known around the neighborhood as "Dr. Ed" because my neighbors come to me for landscape and lawn maintenance advice."

Ed began covering racing events for the *Farmville Herald*, a bi-weekly newspaper where he worked after school, when he was 15. While at Virginia Tech, he worked for the *Blacksburg Sun* covering racing events and had a weekly column on motorsports. Upon graduation, he began his racing career at Bristol Motor Speedway as the Public Relations Director. While still holding that position, in 1979, he also became the General Manager of the

(see **CLARK** on back)

## Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

The 2004/05 academic year was a year of a quick recovery for the Department after a few years of fiscal challenges facing Virginia Tech and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. We managed to secure funding for five new faculty positions, three on- and two off-campus, and established a new Institute for Sustainable and Renewable Resources (ISRR) in Danville, VA ([www.ialr.vt.edu](http://www.ialr.vt.edu)), a collaborative effort among our Department, the Virginia Tech Department of Forestry, the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), and the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute (VBI). The ISRR operation (currently three faculty, one technician, and two graduate students with plans to hire an additional two faculty, two technicians, a postdoctoral researcher, and two graduate students in 2006) has been fully integrated into our research and graduate education programs. The ISRR will focus on research and development of floriculture, nursery and food crops, biological compounds from plants, and novel plant growing media (*WoodGro*, a woodchip-based/polymer nano-coated line of plant growing media for nursery and greenhouse industry).

Our undergraduate (approximately 120 majors) and graduate (20 MS, 12 in non-thesis program at Virginia Beach and 8 in Blacksburg, and 6 PhD) student enrollment has been relatively stable. A total of 31 undergraduate students graduated in 2004-05. The demand for

(see **GREETINGS** on back)

# Alumni News

## 1990-1999

**Kelly D. Wilson** BS '99 has been the Cutting Garden Manager at Hillwood Museum & Gardens in Washington, DC for 4-1/2 years. She lives in McLean, VA.

**Jeremy J. Parker** BS '98 is the owner of Creation Appreciation, a landscaping business. He and his wife Dara have a son, Jameson Stase Parker, born October 15, 2004. They live in Afton, VA.

**Ryan S. Early** BS '95 is an Enterprise Management Engineer at Computer Systems Center, Inc. After working four years at Bozzuto Landscaping, he moved into the computer field. He and his wife Cristina (BA '92) have a 5-year old son, a 3-year old son and a 1-year old daughter. They live in Woodbridge, VA.

**Jeannie Early Lane** BS '95 married Eddie Lane on June 26, 2004. Eddie is the live nursery specialist at Lowe's in Christiansburg, VA. Jeannie stopped working at Lowe's to focus all her time on teaching. She is an agriculture teacher in the Montgomery County Public Schools system.

**Larry G. Stewart** MS '95 is an Associate Professor/Nursery Management Coordinator at the Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute. He received tenure as a 12-month instructor effective July 1, 2004. He and his wife DeAnna live in Wooster, OH.

## 1980-1989

**Shawn D. Rodgers** BS '89 is the district manager of Eastern U.S. Operations DayStar USA Co, an exterior facilities maintenance company. He and his wife Lori have a 2-year-old daughter, Natalie, and they live in Latrobe, PA.

**Denise Doerer-Sharp** MS '81 along with her husband Chuck are continuing to run and expand their agrotourism business featuring greenhouses, pumpkins, and ag and environmental programs on their 520 acre farm near Washington, DC. They live in Brookeville, MD.

**John E. Donegan** MS '80 is employed by Florikan ESA and was promoted to Fertilizer Technical Specialist and South Florida Sales Manager effective January 1, 2005. He and his wife Linda live in Royal Palm Beach, FL.

## 1970-1979

**Tom Tracy** BS '77, MS '79, PhD '99 (Old Dominion University) is the Executive Director of the Virginia Turfgrass Council. He and his wife Tania live in Virginia Beach, VA.

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

## Master of Science Program at Virginia Beach

In 1994, a very unique educational opportunity started at Virginia Tech's Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center (HRAREC) in Virginia Beach. To this day, this MS in Horticulture program remains the only extended campus program of its kind in the United States.

The program is targeted at green industry owners and employees, extension agents, teachers, and people interested in changing careers, many of whom come from the local military. Classes, other than those taken on-line, are taught at HRAREC by the six resident faculty, along with guest lectures by campus faculty and local experts. Courses cover subjects including plant physiology and nutrition, entomology, pathology, weed science, sustainable landscape practices, urban trees, and horticultural writing. The program is non-thesis, and, therefore, most students complete three to six hours of Independent Study projects.

As of August 2005, 55 students have received their MS degrees, and over 100 additional students have taken one or more courses. The program is directed by Dr. Bonnie Appleton, Professor of Horticulture.

## Chicken Barbeque

The Horticulture Department's annual chicken barbeque was held Sunday, September 25, 2005, at Kentland Farm. Pictured below left to right are Charlie O'Dell (retired), Roger Harris, John Barden (retired), and David Davis.



## Organic No-till Research

Organic production systems for vegetable crops represent a relatively small—but rapidly growing—segment of agriculture in the United States and worldwide. Both producer and consumer advocates of organic food are passionate in their belief that organic production systems are more ecofriendly and organic food is



healthier than that produced in conventional agriculture.

Only since 2001 has USDA funding been available to support organic research. In 2003, Dr. Ron Morse received three USDA grants to study organic no-till systems for production of vegetable crops. Historically, weedy fields and inadequate soil fertility (especially poor synchronization of nitrogen supply

and demand) have been major yield-limiting factors in organic production systems. Dr. Morse's research integrates: (1) reduced tillage systems, (2) timely applications of organic fertilizer, and (3) rotation of grass-legume cover crop mixtures and vegetable crops grown on permanent raised beds to suppress weed growth and improve nitrogen fertility and soil quality. Data thus far have been promising, indicating that improved soil fertility and weed suppression achieved in these organic cover cropping systems can facilitate high yielding and high quality vegetable crop production.

## Taiwan Study Leave

Greg Welbaum, a professor in the Department of Horticulture, recently returned from a six-month study leave in the Department of Plant Industry at National Pingtung University of Science and Technology (NPUST) in southern Taiwan. Greg was hosted by Dr. Lelia Wang who completed a sabbatical in Dr. Welbaum's lab at Virginia Tech in 2003. The sabbatical was funded by a grant from the National Science Council of Taiwan and required Greg to give four seminars around the island during his visit. Greg also taught three classes at NPUST and helped his wife teach conversational English in the Foreign Language Department. Greg was able to bring some exotic plant material back to Virginia from Taiwan. The climate of southern Taiwan is very much like south Florida.



### 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Groundbreaking for the Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Department of Horticulture hosted a groundbreaking ceremony the morning of August 2, 2005, to celebrate the beginning of construction of the Peggy Lee Hahn Pavilion. Sharron Quisenberry, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, served as the Master of Ceremonies.

The new building, slated for completion in March, 2006, will occupy 2,300 sq ft and serve as a multi-purpose special events and educational facility. Peggy Lee Hahn and Dr. T. Marshall Hahn, her husband and Virginia Tech president emeritus, pledged a \$1 million estate gift and \$475,000 in start-up funds for the expansion of the garden. On hand to enjoy and participate in the ceremony included the Hahns and many of their family members; faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Horticulture; CALS and VT administrators; Facilities personnel; and others involved in the project.

We are proud that the garden has been named the Hahn Horticulture Garden to honor Mrs. Hahn, an enthusiastic and talented gardener in her own right. Dr. Hahn summed up his feelings on the matter at the groundbreaking ceremony, stating "Peggy's passion is Virginia Tech and flowers, and my passion is Peggy".



Photo credit: Lori Greiner.

Pictured at the groundbreaking ceremony (from left to right): Lynn Eichhorn, Assistant Director of Physical Plant; Sharron Quisenberry, Dean of CALS; T. Marshall Hahn; Peggy Lee Hahn; Holly Scoggins, Horticulture faculty and garden director; Donald Harwood, pavilion architect; and Russell Boyd, Campus Renovations.

## Virginia's Master Gardener Program Continues to Grow

Certified Master Gardeners are volunteer community educators who work in conjunction with and on the behalf of Virginia Cooperative Extension. These specially trained volunteers use horticulture as an avenue to teach environmental stewardship concepts and practices to their next door neighbors and fellow community members. Cooperative Extension has the philosophy of incorporating citizen input in planning and implementation to ensure better success in program delivery. Specific areas that VCE-MG volunteers fulfill the Extension mission include: (1) enhancing the environment through sustainable landscape management practices, (2) using horticulture and landscaping to positively impact youth, (3) using horticulture and landscaping to promote community development and economic growth, (4) producing food in public and private gardens to improve human nutrition and food security, and (5) using horticulture to improve the overall quality of life for Virginia's citizens. The work of Master Gardeners amplifies the effectiveness and impact of our local Extension agents by assisting local Extension offices in delivering programs that address locally identified needs.

Currently, Virginia has approximately 4,000 active certified Master Gardeners who contributed more than 282,000 hours of volunteer time and made more than 480,000 contacts with their fellow citizens in 2004. The time they volunteered collectively was equivalent to 140 full-time staff members and had an economic impact of more than \$5.65 million. Nearly 1,000 new volunteers are trained annually. Recently, volunteers were trained for the first time in Appomattox and Lee counties. To learn more, visit our website at [www.hort.vt.edu/mastergardener](http://www.hort.vt.edu/mastergardener).



A Horticulture Therapy class being conducted by Master Gardener volunteers.

If you want to be happy for an hour, have a meal.  
If you want to be happy for a year, take a spouse.  
If you want to be happy for life, plant a garden.

## SNA Awards for VT Horticulture Students

Brian Jackson, a Ph.D. candidate in Horticulture, working with Dr. Robert Wright, won first place in the Master Student Paper Competition at the Southern Nursery Association Research Conference held in Atlanta, Georgia, this past summer. His presentation was based upon work completed at Auburn University for his M.S. degree under the direction of Dr. Amy N. Wright, B.S. (Chemistry, 1996) and M.S. (Horticulture, 1998) from VT. Brian also won a SNA Sidney B. Meadows Scholarship for outstanding academic achievements. Thomas Saunders, a sophomore at VT, won first place in the undergraduate student competition for his presentation based upon work with Dr. Robert Wright. Working with Thomas has been special for Dr. Wright since he also worked with Thomas' father, Tom Saunders, of Saunders Brothers Nursery, Piney River, Virginia, when he was a student at VT (1977-81). Shown in photo, left to right, are Brian, Robert and Thomas.



## New Faculty

### David Close

David Close joined the faculty on March 1, 2004 as the new State



Master Gardener Coordinator. This 100% Extension position housed in the Department of Horticulture provides statewide leadership for the Master Gardener program. Mr. Close came to Virginia Tech from Southern Illinois University where he previously served as a lecturer in the Department of Forestry and as the Community Forestry Coordinator for the southern 36 counties of the state.

Originally from south central Kentucky, he grew up on a small tobacco and beef farm. David and his wife Constance have three daughters and live in Radford, VA.

### James Tokuhisa

Dr. James (Jim) G. Tokuhisa joined the Department in April 2005. He earned his B.S. degree from the Department of Botany at the University of Illinois-Urbana in 1979, and his Ph.D. in Botany from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1986.

Prior to arriving at Virginia Tech, he was involved in research projects at both national and international agencies. His research focus included identification of mechanisms involved in chilling resistance in plants and identification of plant transcription factors associated with anaerobiosis and crown gall in maize and tobacco. The main thrust of Jim's research program at Virginia Tech will be to study the biosynthesis and function of



glucosinolates in plants in the mustard family. Glucosinolates are compounds of secondary metabolism believed to function predominantly as a component in the plant defense response against pathogens. An understanding of how the pathways of glucosinolate biosynthesis are integrated with primary metabolism under normal development and under conditions of abiotic and biotic stress is its aim. Also, his research seeks to identify how the infection process by pathogenic fungi and bacteria is affected by the specific chemistry of glucosinolate hydrolysis and cytotoxin formation. Jim will be involved in both graduate and undergraduate instruction. Jim was raised in Chicago and is married to Dr. Dorothea Tholl, who also started at Virginia Tech last April. Dorothea is a research scientist in the Department of Biological Sciences. Jim and Dorothea live in Blacksburg and enjoy shopping for antiques and vermicomposting.

### Jake Browder

Mr. Jake Browder, B.S. and M.S. from the Department of Horticulture, 2003 and 2004 respectively, joined the department in February 2005 as a Research Associate. He is directing a project to produce a new container substrate from ground pine trees. His M.S. research projects included the sulfur requirements of container-grown shade trees and development of the

Horhizotron, an instrument for measuring root growth of landscape plants. Jake is from Lawrenceville, Virginia, and enjoys cycling, street hockey, and traveling.



## CLARK (from front)

Nashville International Raceway. In 1981, he went to work for his current employer as Public Relations Director at Charlotte Motor Speedway (now Lowes Motor Speedway). He was later promoted to Vice-President of Events there. In 1992 he was selected to be the Vice-President and General Manager of Atlanta Motor Speedway and was promoted to President of AMS in 1995. In his current position he is directly responsible for the daily operation of one of America's largest sporting venues with a staff of 63 full-time employees that swells to approximately 5,000 on a major event weekend. The Atlanta Motor Speedway hosts two NASCAR Nextel Cup weekends and is currently rebuilding the speedway for the Oct. 30 Bass Pro Shops MBNA 500 weekend after suffering an estimated \$40

million in damages from a July 6 tornado that was part of Hurricane Cindy.

In addition to his love of horticulture, Ed also enjoys fishing, and racing his own Legend and Thunder Roadster cars. He occasionally gets back to the New River to fish, an activity which he enjoyed during his college years.



In the above picture, Ed Clark and Jimmie Johnson pose next to the 2004 Bass Pro Shops MBNA 500 winner's trophy in victory lane. Johnson pulled off an emotional victory for the Hendrick Motorsports team who had lost 10 organization members in a plane crash just seven days before.

## GREETINGS (from front)

our graduates remains high. At this fall's career fair co-sponsored by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the College of Natural Resources, a large proportion of the companies present were landscape contracting companies looking for students with interest in landscape design, installation, and maintenance.

To enhance our undergraduate enrollment, we are building on our successful partnership with the Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) in Abingdon, VA. A new, fully articulated, two-year horticulture program has been developed at the Piedmont Virginia Community College, Charlottesville, VA (pending approval), and negotiations are on-going with two more Community Colleges in the Virginia Community College System. We need more students and would ask that you remember to recommend Horticulture at Virginia Tech to high school students you know who are undecided about where to attend college. We also have a two-year Agriculture Technology curriculum at Virginia Tech with a landscape/turf option that is available to students not interested in a four-year degree.

I would like to invite you to our new Departmental website ([www.hort.vt.edu](http://www.hort.vt.edu)) and give us your feedback ([sears@vt.edu](mailto:sears@vt.edu)). Please also see other Departmental highlights throughout the newsletter and share your reflections, ideas about the format and content of *Seeds* with the editor, Dr. Robert Wright ([wright@vt.edu](mailto:wright@vt.edu)), and/or with me ([jenowak@vt.edu](mailto:jenowak@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*

# Seeds

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