

President's Message

Greetings.

I hope your winter days have been restful and have allowed time for planning and preparation for the 2022 season. This winter has been a quite busy in Huntington



Stephen Saunders

with snow plowing and salting. I was disappointed that a snow storm prevented me from attending MANTS this year. The

reports from MANTS were very positive and those who were able to attend said they were pleased to talk business and to just catch up with colleagues in person.

We had a wonderful set of speakers during our 2022 symposium on January 26 in Charleston. Rick Darke spoke in the morning and Carol Reese spoke after lunch on the Design side of the symposium. Although I could not attend these sessions because I was in the simultaneous Profit session, I only heard positive comments about the great concepts and innovative ideas presented by Rick and Carol. Both are gifted horticulturists and speakers.

Marty Grunder led both the morning and afternoon discussions in the Profit sessions. Marty is the president and CEO of both Grunder Landscaping and The Grow Group in Dayton, Ohio. He is a leading green industry consultant. He based his engaging presentation on the Four Pillars of Success: Platform, People, Processes, and Profits. It was very encouraging to

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Committee Members Open Doors For Employee Pipeline

By Michael Biafore

WVNLA's Board of Directors continues to address the issue of a limited workforce available to West Virginia landscape companies. The Workforce Development Committee's (WDC) committed members have opened up opportunities to create a pipeline of skilled, vetted, and trained employees choosing to enter the landscape profession immediately out of high school, community college and four-year institutions.

To date, the WDC has had formal meetings with the West Virginia Department of Education and the Simulated Work Force program, representatives of the West Virginia National Guard's Jobs & Hope and Mountaineer Challenge Academy programs, and the Upshur County Board of

Education and Technical Schools administrators and faculty. All of these programs can supply our profession with workers that have shown an interest in working outdoor and who may not wish to pursue a four-year college degree.

Graduates of these educational programs are looking for the promise of a secure job and a career path in which they can grow and succeed. These students are continuously drug-tested in order to remain in good standing with the programs in which they participate. Thus far, WVNLA has been



National Guard instructor Scott Byars, left, works with Jobs & Hope and Fresh Start program participants to plant a tree at Logan Armory. Scott later heard that three of the students in this group started a lawn service business.

Please see *JOBS* on page 2.

JOBS: Workforce Development Committee Tackles Labor Issues From Many Angles

Continued from page 1.

welcomed by all of these groups and they are excited to form a working relationship with our members.

Board member Lisa McDavid met with the West Virginia State University Extension Agency to inform them of our initiative and establish a working relationship with them and their WV Tree Minders program.

Executive Director Julie Robinson and I met with National Guard Program representatives on February 18 to present to them our progress to date and to discuss formal landscape curriculum that can be incorporated into their teachings. Board member Bobby Gompers reports that the administrators and faculty for the Upshur County schools are enthusiastic about incorporating a landscape technician program in their career and technical school curriculum.

Board member Zach Crede will be meeting with the Putnam County Technical Schools in the near future. We will also be pursuing contacts with Potomac State College, where a horticulture program has been established, and will be working to start Landscape/Horticulture programs in other state community colleges.

The WDC is also working to create an association/green industry video that can be used to educate teachers, students and the general public as to the importance and impact of the green industry in the state and how we are an untapped resource for viable jobs and economic development in West Virginia. Lisa McDavid is working with Kingery & Company to develop this video.

What the board and committee members ask of and encourage you to do is to consider becoming an active part of this committee and help advance this initiative.

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- You can become an ambassador to one of the groups we are working with and establish a dialogue as to what we have to offer them and what they have to offer us.
- You can agree to be a speaker or trainer once a formal teaching plan has been established.
- And finally, for now, you can make contact with the administrator of one of the tech schools in your area with our plans and start a dialogue on how we can work together for the betterment of the profession and the school system. We will provide an outline to use as a script, videos for your presentation and printed materials to leave behind.

If you have any questions and/or would like to help, please contact committee chairman Michael Biafore, PLA, at 304-594-3006 or

at Michael@Biafore.com.

You may also contact Executive Director Julie Robinson at 304-553-1234 or at wvnlassoc@gmail.com.

Some of these initiatives should yield results quickly. Others will take longer to establish. But the time to start is now. Thank you in

advance for your help in closing the labor/employee gap that we are all experiencing.

Michael R. Biafore, PLA, is the president of Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown and the chairman of WVNLA's Workforce Development Committee.

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see that even though we face some different challenges in West Virginia, many of the problems in our green industry businesses are the same everywhere. If we use good business practices and work hard, we have the opportunity to build a business that we can be proud of.

One challenge that nearly everyone in the industry faces is labor and staffing.

WVNLA has been working hard this winter to develop programs to encourage young people and others to consider careers in the landscape and

nursery industries. Michael Biafore of Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown has taken the lead in the committee for this project. Read more about the committee's direction and goals in his featured article. Our hopes are to enhance employment opportunities for West Virginians.

Spring is just around the corner. Good luck and be safe.

Stephen Saunders

WVNLA President Stephen Saunders owns Saunders Lawn Care in Huntington.

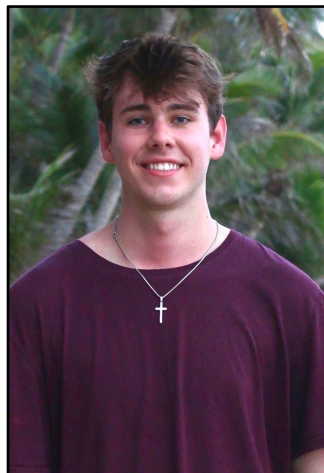
Two Stellar Students Awarded 2022 Scholarships

Two promising West Virginia University students have been selected as WVNLA's 2022 Marcus W. Rennix Memorial Scholarship winners. **Ruston Seaman**, a Landscape Architecture and an Environmental and Community Planning double major, and **Mathias Solliday**, a Horticulture major, both received full scholarships in the amount of \$5,000, based on their academic achievements, experience and instructor recommendations.

Ruston Seaman is a native of Buckhannon, where he graduated from Philip Barbour High School. His interest in outdoor spaces started in childhood when he used natural materials like sticks and rocks to create structures. His parents fostered his interest and included him in designs for projects such as their patio and outdoor fireplace.

Through his parents' love of travel and mission work in places such as the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Haiti and throughout the United States, Ruston was exposed to different cultures, design styles and ideas that he thinks will benefit his career as a landscape architect.

"I have always had a deep love and respect for my home state of West Virginia. I feel as if my Mountaineer roots have motivated me to want to help the state continue to grow as it continues to strength. I would love to stay in state and use my dual degree to work with the very communities that have raised me," Ruston said in his application letter.



Ruston Seaman

He'd like to continue the kind of work he's doing in a design studio which is a redevelopment project for the city of Montgomery. The design

will be used to as part of a grant request for the city. Ruston's excellent performance in the classroom as well as his leadership skills prompted his Landscape Architecture professor Vaike Haas to recommend him for the scholarship.

"Ruston is a designer and deadline-driven one. His final project for LARC 360 was one of the best in his class, strongly resolved, with good attention to detail and high-quality graphics," Professor Haas wrote. "He will be an asset to the workplace with his

ability to work independently while being careful to fulfill project requirements and exceed expectations for design deliverables/graphics."

Both Professor Hass and Chris Dodge, who chairs the board of a non-profit organization in Philippi, spoke of Ruston's strong work ethic and empathy for others, which has led him to complete several volunteer projects in the community.

Mathias Solliday is a Horticulture major from Green Bank who graduated from Pocahontas County High School. In addition to achieving an



Mathias Solliday

excellent academic record, Mathias gained horticulture research experience through the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience Program at WVU. He worked with

a mentor to research the effects of differing watering times on the development of kale and coleus. He also worked in greenhouses throughout his high school years.

He plans to continue his education with at least an M.S. degree and then put his education to work in his hometown.

"I plan to return to Green Bank to open a small nursery. At this nursery, I plan to sell horticultural crops and vegetable plants to locals for their gardens. For year-round income, I plan to distribute microgreens to restaurants and other consumers in nearby towns and cities," Mathias said in his application letter.

Because Green Bank is a small town with limited employment opportunities, Mathias said he is pleased that the addition of his nursery will bring jobs to the area.

Horticulture professor David Davis wrote that Mathias' passion for horticulture was evident from the first time he taught him in class. He has taken both Plant Propagation and Woody Plants courses

Please see SCHOLARSHIPS on page 4.

State Offers Funds for Company Employee Training

By David Lavender

The state of West Virginia's Department of Economic Development has a variety of programs that can help companies find and train workers.

Our heirloom program is the **Governor's Guaranteed Workforce Program**, which is a



training reimbursement program. Under that program, the department taps a variety of funds from the Appalachian Regional Commission, American Electric Power and state funds to help reimburse companies for training their workers, whether they are new hires or incumbent workers. The new American Electric Power funds are specifically designed to help small business of 50 or less in American Electric Power's coverage areas as a give-back to their commercial customers and a way to support workforce training around West Virginia.

The GGWF can reimburse companies for up to \$2,000 per worker per training (depending upon the wage of the employees being trained). The funds must be used for upcoming, scheduled related trainings. The fund is run on the fiscal year, which begins each July 1.

Visit westvirginia.gov and search for GGWF for details on what is covered.

The GGWF is a very simple process. Companies fill out a short tax form. Once we get the green light from the tax department that a company's taxes are up-to-date, the company sends in a short (four-page) training application that details the scheduled trainings and costs. In about 2-3 weeks, an award is made and then the company draws from that fund as those training costs are incurred.

Additionally, the Department of Economic Development can help businesses connect with other state resources, such as WorkForce WV (which can help advertise for workers), and connect businesses to workers (and additional resources particularly for displaced workers, people with military background, and others who qualify).

We can also connect companies to West Virginia's community and technical colleges which have a Learn and Earn program that pays for half of a student's wages while they are in college.

For more information, visit westvirginia.gov and search for incentives and programs/workforce programs.

Lastly, the Department of Economic Development workforce team is assisting the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) West Virginia Office of Apprenticeship in helping connect companies to the time-tested apprenticeship model. Currently, there are more than 1,400 U.S. occupations that have registered apprenticeships. We have a U.S. DOL grant that allows another \$800 per apprentice to companies training apprentices on top of any training reimbursement awards through our GGWF. Modern apprenticeships are simply a flexible blend of on-the-job and classroom training that is company-controlled. Visit apprenticeship.gov for more information.

For additional information, contact David at David.L.Lavender@wv.gov or 304-932-2045.

SCHOLARSHIPS *Continued from page 3.*

from Professor Davis, and excelled in both.

"He attended class regularly, was prompt and participated in class. He is currently in my Case Studies in Horticulture course, which is our capstone course. To sum things up, Mathias is the ideal student that professors marvel at. He is smart,

clever and mature for his age. I expect him to excel in the green industry," Professor Davis wrote.

Upon notification of their selection as scholarship recipients, both young men expressed gratitude to WVNLA for the recognition and financial assistance. We wish them both success in their careers.

Where They Are Now: A Look at Two Former Scholarship Recipients

Growing An Heirloom Seed Business

When 2014 WVNLA scholarship recipient Silas Childs graduated in 2015, he planned to pursue a career in plant breeding. The route has been somewhat circuitous, but Silas did just that last year, launching SylvanRoots, a heritage seed business he nurtures from Morgantown.

After Silas graduated with a B.S. in Horticulture from West Virginia University, he went on to study plant breeding at the University of Georgia.

"I got there rather by accident. I'd applied for a job, but they suggested I come to study plant breeding and genetics," Silas said. He left Georgia with an M.S. to return to Morgantown, his adopted home. He'd grown up in Michigan and Australia, but considered West Virginia home after his years at WVU. He was hired as the greenhouse director at WVU's Evansdale greenhouse. He stayed there a year, before the yen to own a business took hold.

He worked at a greenhouse in Westover where the owner grew microgreens to supply restaurants near and far. The business didn't survive the Covid hit to restaurants, but Silas gleaned some important knowledge and experience in his time there.

"I learned about running a small business from him. I always wanted to own my own business, but knowing how to do that was a big gap in my background," he said.

He began modestly with SylvanRoots, renting



SylvanRoots offers 'Logan County Greasy Cut-short' bean seeds.

farmland to grow the vegetable plants from which he harvests and researches seeds. "I started small. I don't want to go into debt, which is easy to do when you start a business."

His production focuses on vegetables that do well in West Virginia and the Appalachian region. He takes the time and effort

to test varieties before he offers them for sale. He sells to seed companies, as well as on Etsy.

His business is in its early days. You can find SylvanRoots online at Etsy. Until it takes off, he'll keep his day job during carpentry work. He had some practical advice for anyone considering a career in horticulture.

"Studying horticulture sounds lovely, but you need to be aware that it is a pretty low-paying field.

If you start there and think of all the opportunities for doing work that you truly enjoy, that is what you lose if you choose to work in a field that is boring and unsatisfying," Silas said.

Although there are always challenges in a market that isn't prepared

to pay for the research and trials needed to produce a successful heirloom seed, Silas sees hope for potential customers in hobby farmers and others who care for the land.



Silas Childs holds a multiplier onion called 'Aska,' which he developed.

Q&A with Zack Grossl on His Career

In what year did you graduate and with what degree?

I graduated in the spring of 2018 with a B.S. in Landscape Architecture from West Virginia University.

What job did you take after graduation?

I took a job as a landscape designer at WithersRavenel in Raleigh, NC, where I still work. I work in the Parks and Recreation Department and I get to work on a lot of public projects.

Are you doing what you envisioned while you were a student?

Yes. That and a whole lot more.

What do you like about the job?

My coworkers are a big part, but I also really like the mixed bag of projects that I get to work.

Please see PAST SCHOLARS on page 6.



At the Winter Symposium, WVNLA President Stephen Saunders recognized Michael Biafore (*above*) as the Association's 2022 Person of the Year. Michael heads the Workforce Development Committee, which is exploring avenues to increase green industry careers.

2022 Outstanding Person of the Year

West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association

For his efforts to encourage young people and others to consider careers in the landscape and nursery industries,

Michael Biafore

has been named

Outstanding Person of the Year

on this day of January 26, 2022, by the Board of Directors of the West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association.

In addition to reaching out to a wide variety of resources and programs for both adults and high school students, Michael spearheads a committee charged with enhancing employment opportunities for West Virginians.

We wish Michael much success, as all the industry will benefit from these efforts, and thank him for the time and expertise he has committed to the cause.

PAST SCHOLARS continued from page 5.

What other areas/jobs interest you?

I enjoy the digital graphic representation of landscapes and landscape design. I am working on taking my firm's rendering quality to the next level. I believe it is a part of our job as designers to be able to tell the story of our designs to anyone.

How did your education prepare you for your career?

My education helped me with all the skills I needed to jump into learning as much as I could on the job.

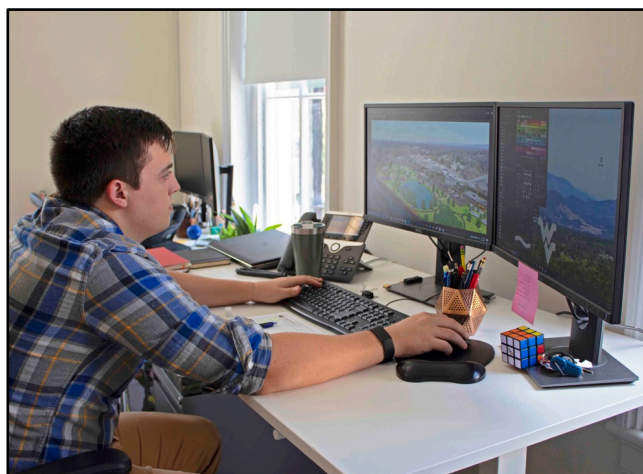
As you have gained real-world experience, what challenges do you think the landscape industry faces?

I feel in a lot of projects, landscaping gets pushed to the back or left as an afterthought. We need to be involved from the beginning. It makes for a better finished product.

What would you say to a student who was

considering a career in landscape architecture?

The field of landscape architecture has so much to offer. There are so many different directions one can take within the field. Once you find your niche, go be an expert in it.



Zack Grossl works on a design project.

WVNLA Welcomes New Members

4 Seasons Lawn Care and More, LLC

Active member

Brian Walls and TJ Williamson

P.O. Box 56

Barboursville, WV 25504

304-962-7448

4seasonslcm@gmail.com

4seasonslcm.com

Landscape designer, construction and lighting, landscape and lawn maintenance.

Bryant Landscaping

Active member

Clark Bryant II

1148 Shady Lane

St. Albans, WV 25177

invoice@bryantslandscaping.org

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941-787-0991

Lawn and landscape maintenance.

Dickson's Lawn Care LLC

Active member

Andrew Dickson

1704 Carter Lane

Lesage, WV 25537

304-634-8966

Afd1ride@frontier.com

Landscape and Lawn Maintenance.

Kenton Eggleston

Individual Professional member

1683 Statts Mill Road

Ripley, WV 25271

304-984-2613

kenny@edgewoodcc.com

Eleanor Gould

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434-466-5519

gould.eleanor@gmail.com

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Bradenton, FL 34203

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Donna Hibbs

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The Greenbrier

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White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986

304-956-0776

donna_hibbs@greenbrier.com

Kelly Green Lawn Spray

Active member

Rick Cutlip

1154 Halls Ridge Road

Princeton, WV 24739

304-431-1199

Flasglo124@yahoo.com

Landscape and lawn maintenance, fertilization and weed control, arborist and Certified Professional Horticulturist.

Macsek Lawncare, LLC

Active member

Matthew Macsek

104 Fox Tail Lane

Elizabeth, WV 26143

304-741-3603

mjmacsek61@gmail.com

Landscape and lawn maintenance.

Mathias Lawn Care

Jeffrey Mathias

129 Larkspur Lane

Shepherdstown, WV 25443

540-550-7327

mathiaslawncare05@gmail.com

mathiaslawncare.com

Landscape construction, landscape and lawn maintenance, hardscape design and installation, landscape lighting, and seasonal lighting.

West Virginia State University Extension – Agriculture & Resources Division

Associate member

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WVNLA NEWS

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Harbinger of Spring



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