

President's Message

I hope that the spring of 2022 has treated you all well. While we are working hard to meet and exceed our customers' challenges, there are a few things I have



Stephen Saunders

noticed this year...

We are still struggling with shortages of supplies and equipment that are being blamed on COVID.

Prices have gone up as well. It is always shocking to see the new prices on supplies and parts. Equipment is hard to get and wait times are at an all-time high.

Gas and diesel prices are outrageous.

Labor is costing more and is harder to find, whether you are using local employees or the H2B seasonal worker visa program. All of these struggles seem to be the new normal.

Looking ahead, I see changes coming as well. For instance, a recent article in the Huntington Herald Dispatch noted that Marshall University has changed over to all battery-operated equipment for ground maintenance crews. I am watching closely to see how this works for them. Robotic mowers are becoming more advanced and are probably not far from being useful for the commercial maintenance industry.

As we go to work daily and enjoy nature all around us, try to take a minute to realize how blessed we are.

Stephen Saunders is WVNLA president and owner of Saunders Lawn Care in Huntington.

Installation Honors Families of Board Members and Promotes Outdoor Play

It was already hot at 9 a.m. on a Saturday in May when about 25 volunteers gathered on a grassy lot behind the Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind (CWAB) in Huntington to install a play area. A concrete pad had been poured earlier, and a pavilion had been built, with trusses constructed and installed by students in Hugh Roberts' carpentry class at Cabell Career and Technical Center.

Volunteers watched as John Perry of Grass Busters manned a Ventrac tractor and tiller to break up and remove the sod. In the sweltering 90-degree heat, volunteers pulled out chunks of sod, broken brick and other debris. Others pulled out the remains of a submerged horseshoe pit. Mark Springer of Lavalette Landscaping remembered installing the pit decades ago.

After the grass was removed, work began to dig, line with fabric, fill and tamp down gravel on the paths around the pavilion and the quadrants. The divisions will form themed play areas in the Natural Learning Environment.

The project is the brainchild of WVNLA board member and past president Dave Hill and current president Steve Saunders. Both have designated the funds available to them from the President's Projects fund for this installation. Dave, who is a certified



Volunteers got a good start on Day One of the installation of a Natural Learning Environment playground at the Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind in Huntington.

Natural Learning Environment designer and installer, wished to create the playground at CWAB in honor of a former board member Mike Bartholomew, whose daughter was born with serious eye issues.

Dave became interested in natural playgrounds after reading a study that showed that children are losing the ability to play imaginatively. Their days are filled with structured activities in which a leader instructs them.

In a Natural Learning Environment, children use objects found in nature to create their own games and fun, without any instruction. The deceptively simple set-up actually holds

Please see VOLUNTEERS on page 2.

VOLUNTEERS transform grassy lot into imaginative play area *Continued from page 1.*

their attention longer than a playground filled with bright plastic equipment.

Subsequently, Steve added his president's



John Perry breaks up sod and soil while Mark Springer digs in by shovel.

project allocation to the cause. Steve's uncle and aunt, Willis and Mary Ann Saunders, were both blind and were active at CWAB.

Steve's cousin Teri Saunders Booten, who is Willis and Mary Ann's daughter, brought her family and friends, including five strong young men, to give a substantial labor boost to the project. "Both Mom and Dad were completely blind. Mom lost her sight as an infant when she developed an eye infection in 1940. They began to use antibiotics to treat eye infections in 1941. Dad had a rare bone condition that pinched off his optic nerve. Neither of them had any visual memory," Teri explained.

Her parents met at the Romney School for the Deaf and Blind and eventually settled in Huntington, where they were active at CWAB. Teri's father has passed away, but her mother still lives in Huntington.

In preparation for the project, Dave and Steve picked up and delivered supplies. Steve brought a bobcat, plate compactor and a dump truck to remove debris. John Perry also provided a power rake and tiller.



Dave Hill reviews the site plan.

At the conclusion of Day One, the soil had been turned, landscape fabric placed, gravel pathways installed and the perimeter landscaping planted. A mix of family, friends and WVNLA members and employees all worked steadily. John Perry brought six Grass Busters employees who volunteered to help. Steve Saunders had four Saunders Lawn Care employees helping out. TerraCare landscape designer Eleanor Gould and her friend and

landscape student Maram Moushmoush put in a full day's work, as did Mark Springer, and, of course, Dave Hill.

"I'm really excited to have the opportunity to help install this beautiful playground," Eleanor said, adding that she hadn't had a chance to work on one in her career and was anxious to see what they were all about.

With the landscape and structural bones in place, the playground's features will take shape during the next work party, scheduled for



From left, Eleanor Gould, Maram Moushmoush and Shelley Muth-Adkins plant a clethra border.

9 a.m., Saturday, June 11. At it, volunteers will:

Construct wooden boxes for sandboxes and containers for loose parts in the Calm Play area;

Install stump steppers, a balance bridge and an elevated log in the Active Play area, along with an earthen slide, boulders and a rope rail;

Construct benches to be placed in the grassy

Open Play area and other spaces;

Install talking tubes and sound tubes in the Music Area, and;

Plant fragrant perennials and shrubs



Saunders employees lay landscape fabric while family volunteers smooth gravel on a pathway.

with soft structures that will attract butterflies and insects in the Sensory Garden, and also install log seats in the area.

If you would like to volunteer for the June 11 work session, please contact Julie Robinson at 304-553-1234 or wvnlassoc@gmail.com.

Creating a Sustainable Workforce in West Virginia

By Michael Biafore

Workforce Development Committee chairman

WVNLA's board of directors and members of the Workforce Development Committee (WDC) would like to update our membership on progress the WDC has made in the second quarter and what we are working toward in the future.

The committee has furthered our partnership with the West Virginia National Guard's Jobs & Hope and Challenge Academy programs. We have had several meetings and are using National Association of Landscape Professionals' "Bootcamp for Landscape Technicians" training manual to establish a formal curriculum for the training of landscape professionals. Unfortunately, the first formal training we had scheduled in April had to be postponed, but it was rescheduled for August. As a side note, our association has added two new Morgantown-area members, an equipment supplier and hardscape supplier, who are excited to be involved with this training, to be held at Camp Dawson.

Bobby Gompers of Highland Landscaping met with agriculture students at the Upshur County Tech School. They already had two students signed up for the new landscape design and installation class with expectation of signing up more after the presentation. Bobby used a PowerPoint presentation provided by WVNLA, which he said was a helpful tool to reach the students, who were definitely engaged with the slides showing our members' crews at work.

Lisa McDavid of Lisa's GardenScapes met with Buffalo High School plant sciences students in April. *See details of Lisa's visit in related article on page 7.* Zach Crede of Crede Lawn and Landscaping is working with the Putnam County Technical School to advance the implementation of a landscape program at the high school level.

These are exactly the grassroots efforts we need to get behind in order to create interest and excitement for the landscape profession in the state educational systems.

We have received the first draft of the landscape professionals' video we commissioned from Kingery and Company and the WDC will be meeting to review, tweak and revise the video and the related PowerPoint presentation.

WVNLA Executive Director Julie Robinson and I had a productive meeting with some folks at Pierpont Community and Technical College. Nancy Lignus, Director of Workforce, Continuing Education, and Economic Development is working

on an overview of what a Landscape Program at Pierpont could look like and what the costs and constraints would be. There may be an opportunity to write a grant proposal to help fund the program.

Nancy would like to form a steering committee of our members and members of the community to work toward formalizing a plan to bring this program to fruition. This could be used as a pilot program to bring landscape training to other state community colleges. She will be attending our board meeting at the West Virginia Botanic Garden in Morgantown on June 14 to bring us up to speed on her progress.

Julie and I have also had meetings with representatives from Sen. Joe Manchin's office in Washington DC and West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt's office. They and their staff are willing to partner with the WVNLA in development of our workforce initiative, and we are continuing to collaborate. We also asked both representatives for a direct quote and brief video in support of the landscape industry in West Virginia and the many benefits it provides to our state.

WVNLA's board of directors and members of the WDC continue to encourage our members to participate in our initiative as it is a huge undertaking, but will be a great boost to our profession in the state.

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

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.

Michael Biafore is the president of Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown.



Companula glomarata contrasts with a variegated sedum.

Agritourism Keeps Customers Coming to Gritt's Farm

Early this spring, customers browsed through the greenhouses at Gritt's Farm, thoughtfully selecting annuals, vegetables, perennials, roses and shrubs for their gardens. Friendly dogs wandered among the customers or just lazed in a sunny spot. Customers make the drive out a country road in Buffalo as a rite of spring to visit the greenhouses that run along a ridgetop.

The Gritt family farm, now operating under fourth-generation Brad Gritt as general manager



Gritt's popular farm-to-table dinners frequently sell out.

and his father Bob, owner, has come a long way from its origins as a dairy and vegetable farm to a showplace of

agritourism

today. Its farm-to-table dinners sell out; the six-week Fun Farm brings thousands for autumn pumpkins, mums, a maze and 30 other attractions; and guests flock to private events onsite, including weddings, cookouts, birthday parties and family reunions.

They also do a brisk business at their Capitol Market location in Charleston, offering the same annual, vegetable, herb and perennial plants along with produce fresh from their farm and greenhouses.

It's no accident that the employees at Gritt's Farm seem as happy as the customers.

"One of the core values here at the farm is fun. We believe fun should be a part of everything we do. We don't view it as a job, but as a calling. And we love it," said Brad Gritt. "Laugh. Be grateful, positive and hospitable. Make people feel good."

"Personally, I feel that this is the greatest field you could work in. Being outside, around live plants and food, and creating memorable experiences for families that we want our staff to participate in makes it an amazing place to work."

The family is full of innovators, according to marketing manager Alexandra Pfost. In the 1980s, Gritts Farm began producing hydroponic tomatoes, which still fill two of their nine greenhouses.

Hydroponic tomatoes as well as cucumbers, lettuces and herbs are also grown at Gritt's Midway Greenhouse, owned by Jim Gritt. Jim and Bob are first cousins. Gritt's Midway Greenhouse is just

down the road from Gritt's Farm outside of Eleanor, where they also have a garden center. Their hydroponic produce as well as potted plants are sold as both retail and wholesale, perhaps most notably in Kroger. Gritt's Midway also has outdoor space at Capitol Market, so it gets a little confusing.

About 15 years ago, Bob Gritt of Gritt's Farm planted a pumpkin patch and invited people to come pick their own pumpkins. From that grew the Fun Farm, a family-friendly six weeks where visitors can negotiate the corn maze, slip down the over-sized slide, ride in a tractor-pulled wagon or play in the corn bin. Of course, they can also buy autumn mums and pumpkins to decorate their homes.

"It's the busiest time of the year on the farm. Fall is our peak season. We bring in lots of local high school students to help out. Neighbors, family members and friends all help out. Local ladies work in our bakery. It's so much fun," Alexandra said.

Five years ago, Gritt's began offering farm-to-table dinners featuring seasonal harvest grown on the farm's 300 acres as well as local ingredients from fellow farmers. It's all prepared by chef Jesse Lyons and served al fresco in the farm's spacious pavilion. Jesse Lyons owns and is head chef at Coco's Kitchen and Café in Charleston.

July is pick-your-own-flower month. Customers can select blooms from a brilliantly colored field of flowers, including zinnias, cosmos marigolds, ageratum, celosia, sunflowers, scabiosa, lisianthus, and craspedia. In September, visitors can't take their eyes off the field of golden sunflowers that provide the perfect backdrop for photographs.

Gritt's popular Farm Shares are a subscrip-

tion-based produce delivery system.

Customers pick up farm-fresh produce at designated sites, or can opt for home delivery.

This year, the shares are

customizable. Customers select the contents of the boxes they receive and the size of the order. The list of seasonal produce is extensive. A partial list



Families and school groups flock to the Fun Farm to enjoy autumnal activities.

Continued on page 5.

From West Virginia Department of Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt

Products Generally Available Pesticide Policy Statement

With the passage of HB 4644, effective June 8, 2022, annual pesticide business licenses and certification are no longer required for persons applying lawn care and pest control products that are generally available through retail sale at groceries, drug stores and other stores. As we applaud the Legislature's effort to continue to reduce red tape and overburdensome regulations, we still believe there is value in hiring licensed pesticide application businesses employing certified pesticide applicators. This ensures those businesses are properly insured and their applicators have received initial training and continuing education as outlined in §61-12A Certified Pesticide Applicator Rules. In addition, the WVDA will continue to uphold the federally mandated certification and licensing program, as well as provide oversight over lawn care and pest control services.

Licensing requirements and continuing education ensure that an individual has proper knowledge of pesticide application. The misapplication of pesticides has the potential to harm humans, animals and the environment. The safe and effective use of pesticides is of utmost importance to the WVDA. For that reason, we will

continue to encourage our current licensed companies and individuals to maintain licensing. The WVDA offers initial certification training at no charge, as well as continuing education training assistance. Moving forward, we recommend the public contact licensed businesses for services.

We will continue to work with our lawn care and pest control industries to foster economic development, as well as safe and effective use of pesticides. If you have suggestions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

For a list of current licensed businesses and applicators visit <https://wvplants.wvda.us>.

If you have any questions regarding pesticide applicators, please reach out to Grant Bishop at (304) 558-2209 Ext. 4200 or gbishop@wvda.us or visit <https://agriculture.wv.gov/divisions/regulatory-and-environmental-affairs/pesticides/>.

Make sure to check out the WVDA's Field Watch: <https://agriculture.wv.gov/fieldwatch/>. This tool allows producers, apiarist and pesticide applicators to increase awareness and communication as part of ongoing conservation efforts.

GRITT'S Continued from page 4.

includes corn, cucumbers, eggplant, beans, peppers, pumpkins, okra, tomatoes, squash, and zucchini as well as leafy greens like cabbage, kale, lettuce, spinach and Swiss chard and root vegetables like beets, onions, fennel, garlic and potatoes. Produce production is managed by Brad's brother Bobby.

"The Farm Shares are Brad's idea. It's a great way to get customers fresh produce to their tables," Alexandra said.

Events offered year-round at Gritt's Farm include private events and public workshops to create decorative items such as containers plantings and wreaths. In 5-7 years, people will have a another reason to visit the farm in the winter. The first group of Christmas trees was planted last year and will be ready for visitors to select and cut to take home.

With an ever-evolving events schedule, who knows what the Gritts will offer next.

"It's an honor and privilege to have a business in West Virginia. We are fortunate that the generations before us put in the work to lay the foundation," Brad said. "Our vision for the future of



The 300-acres at Gritt's Farm produce fresh vegetables, greens and herbs.

the farm is to continue to use innovative ways to build a farm our founders would still be proud of today. On our travels around the country, whether for pleasure or business, we are always looking for ideas and things we can bring back to our state to make it a better place to live."

For more information on Gritt's Farm, visit grittsfarm.com, call 304-93702565, or find them on Facebook.

Plan to Attend Lake County, Ohio's Nursery Tour in September

Join us Sept. 22-23 as WVNLA members and guests visit the nurseries of Lake County. This unique area along Lake Erie is home to more than 100 nurseries. Klyn Nurseries will be our host on a field day Thursday, Sept. 22, followed by a tour and dinner at nearby Ferrante Winery. We'll visit a private garden said to rival some of Europe's finest gardens.

Dinner and associated tour costs will be covered by WVNLA. Attendees are responsible for travel and hotel costs.

The area's rich nursery heritage began in the late 1800s when Storr and Harrison established the first nursery in the area. The moderate climate, diverse soil types and proximity to major highways and shipping markets are key factors in the area nurseries' success today.

Some of the nurseries got a start as "lunchbox nurseries." Employees of some of the original nurseries who hoped to open their own nurseries often wrapped cuttings from the plants they were

tending and tucked them carefully into their lunchboxes. They tended them on their own small plots and often used them to open their own businesses. At one time, a section of homes between North Ridge Road and Madison Avenue in Painesville was nicknamed "Lunchbox Nursery Row" because so many of the small nurseries there got their start with plants smuggled home in lunchboxes.

Tour plans are still evolving, and we'd love to hear what you would like to see. Don't miss the chance to shape the tour, which has numerous options in the area. Reach Julie Robinson at 304-553-1234 or wvnlassoc@gmail.com with suggestions.

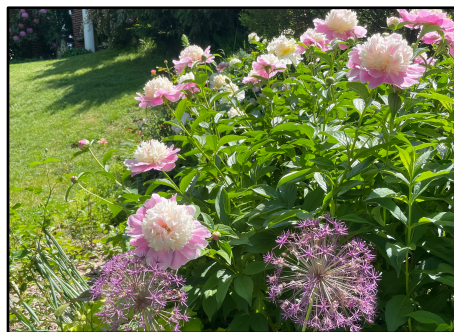


Add your Voice to Advocacy for Intelligent Legislation

Voices for Healthy Green Spaces is a community of supporters dedicated to highlighting the benefits of managed landscapes. Landscape and lawn care professionals contribute to sustainable environments, generate positive economic activity, protect the health and safety of our communities, and make nature accessible to everyone.

Extensive scientific research, education, training, and years of professional experience go into our industry best practices. All too often the landscape industry faces local, state, and federal policy challenges driven by misinformation and lack of understanding of how important well-managed green spaces are to the environmental, economic, and experiential health of local communities.

Federal, state and local policymakers often lack



Peonies and alliums provide late springtime color.

the industry knowledge and environmental expertise to make informed policy decisions on these complex issues — and the wrong policies can

impact us all.

The voices of industry members and consumers are both critical to protect our ability to provide the services we offer and deliver the results we're committed to. Our voices are stronger when we work together, and that's why we need yours.

Voices for Healthy Green Spaces is a project of the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP). NALP and members of our industry work collaboratively with credible agencies, including the EPA, to create more responsible, uniform policies that are based on science and research.

Our Voices for Healthy Green Spaces supporters strive to educate themselves, policymakers, and the general public on the important work of the industry and to ensure policies that affect our local green spaces are based in science and reflect informed best practices. Whether you call or email your elected officials, attend local townhalls, or simply share information with your friends and family, our mission remains the same: to elevate the voices of the industry and the communities it serves, and to ensure people have access to accurate information on a range of important issues.

It's Free to Join

Visit <https://greenspacevoices.org/about-us/> to join at no cost.

High School Students Eager to Hear about Landscape Careers

Lisa McDavid, owner of Lisa's Gardenscapes, opened the eyes of students in a plant science class at Buffalo High School earlier this spring when she and an employee visited the classroom and talked about green industry careers.

She told students what a day's work entailed for her, and what she liked about the job. They talked about other career paths in the industry and answered student's questions.

"Students seemed interested in finding out what a professional landscape career path entails. Many had no idea that there are so many different job categories available to choose from," said Lisa.

Lisa brought two colorful hand-outs on landscape careers for the students. These hand-outs are a good starting point for conversations and are available to any WVNLA member who requests them. She also showed videos on the topic.

Lisa spoke extemporaneously, but WVNLA also has a PowerPoint presentation available for business owners and professionals to use when

speaking to groups, as well as a recently produced video showcasing green industry owners in West Virginia.

Students seemed to especially engage with TikTok videos, silly plant jokes, and a pop quiz with prizes. Lisa would be happy to share the materials she used and strongly encourages other WVNLA members to ask to speak with agriculture or plant science students at their local high schools.

She also told the students that most landscape and nursery companies in West Virginia are hiring and that WVNLA is working to provide training and educational opportunities at the high school and adult education.

"Now, 16 students in the western part of the state are aware that there are businesses that want to hire, train and promote those who are interested in a green industry career within our state," Lisa said.

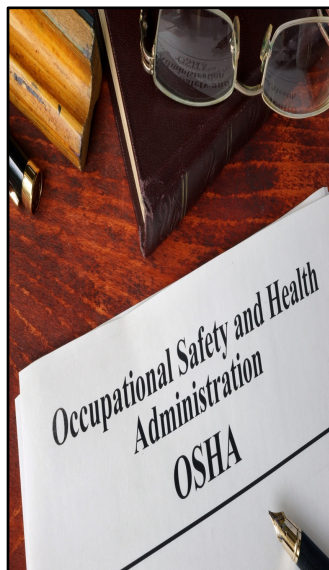
Are You Feeling the Heat? OSHA is Watching

By Craig Regelbrugge

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has announced a new "national emphasis program" for heat illness in outdoor and indoor occupations in targeted industries. This means that OSHA can now launch heat-related inspections on high-risk worksites before workers suffer preventable injuries, illnesses, or fatalities. Agriculture and landscaping are both

included in the list of targeted industries. The National Emphasis Program is in addition to expected future regulation relating to heat illness; earlier this year OSHA sought public comment on the topic via an advance notice of proposed rulemaking.

Craig Regelbrugge is Executive Vice President for Advocacy, Research, & Industry Relations at AmericanHort. Reprinted with permission



July Pesticide Ed Course

WVNLA will offer a Pesticide Recertification Course on **July 20** at Glade Springs Resort in Daniels. To register, visit wvnla.org. There is no cost to WVNLA members. Non-members pay \$50.

Welcome New Members

Grounds Guys of Charleston

Active member

Greg Paxton

1877 Kanawha Two Mile Rd, Charleston, WV 25312

304-720-0519

gpaxton@gmail.com

Lawn and landscape maintenance

Joshua Nance

Individual Professional member

3917 Ashton Upland Road, Ashton, WV 25503

304-674-3687

jpn1985@yahoo.com

Horticulture specialist for TruGreen

Sunset Outdoor Supply

Active member

Barry Frey

2184 Cheat Road, Morgantown, WV 26508

304-777-2194

unsetoutdoorsupply@gmail.com

sunsetoutdoorsupply.com

Equipment supplier

WVNLA NEWS

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Events of Note

- June 14** **WVNLA Board Meeting**, West Virginia Botanic Garden, Morgantown, 10 a.m.
- July 16-19** **Cultivate 2022**, Columbus, OH
Visit: cultivateevent.org
- July 20** **WVNLA Pesticide Recertification session**, Glade Springs, Daniels. Visit wvnla.org
- Sept. 18-21** **NALP Elevate Conference**, Orlando, FL Visit landscapeprofessionals.org/elevate
- Sept. 22-23** **WVNLA Lake County Nursery Tour**, See details on page 6.

2023

- Jan. 11-13** **MANTS**, Baltimore, MD
- Feb. 22** **WVNLA Winter Symposium**, Charleston

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Robert Gompers – bgompers@aol.com

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Mark Springer – mark@lavallette.net

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