

## President's Message

Hello, and Happy Spring!  
The redbud trees lining I-79 will soon show proof that the long



*Bobby Gompers  
WVNLA President*

West Virginia winter is coming to a close.

Likewise, our all-too-short spring season will be well underway.

Growers are busy taking orders and digging plant material. For the landscapers, this is the “quiet before the storm” that is spring landscape work.

We all have different jobs to do, but we surely have lots of things in common; one of which is the task of finding laborers, employees and members for our team. Finding the right employees in the green industry can be a tough task for many reasons, no matter the size of the company.

One of the reasons that I feel we struggle to attract quality people in the industry is because of our wages. A large portion of desirable employees in our state flock to trades that offer higher pay. They look for trades that meet or exceed a “living wage.”

A living wage refers to an income level that allows individuals or families to afford their basic living needs. The national average living wage is \$24.16 per hour or \$50,249.00 annually for a family with two children. For one full-time working adult with no children, it was \$17.46 per hour or \$36,311 annually. Keep in mind, these statistics are from 2022, and we are all aware inflation is likely still on the rise.

*Please see PRESIDENT on page 5.*

## Two promising students receive top marks and scholarships

Two applicants for the 2023 Marcus W. Rennix Memorial Scholarship so impressed the board of directors that they awarded them both full \$5,000 scholarships. Garrett Balog of Charleston is a junior studying horticulture at West Virginia University.

He graduated from Mooresville Senior High School in North Carolina.

Seth Glazer of Huntington attends Columbus State Community College and is majoring in landscape design and management. He is a graduate of Huntington High School.



*Garrett Balog*

The scholarship is available to West Virginia students studying horticulture, landscape architecture, and nursery and greenhouse management. Students must be in-state residents who have completed half the required courses in ornamental horticulture or landscape architecture and have maintained at least a 2.5 grade point average.

### Garrett Balog

Garrett discovered his love for the green industry while working in a greenhouse in high school. He then worked as an



*Seth Glazer*

intern with Davey Tree in Charleston, which spurred his interest in arboriculture and tree care. He plans to pursue a career with Davey Tree. Ed Legge, who manages that Davey Tree office, was pleased to hear Garrett was awarded the scholarship because he said he had been an excellent employee.

Garrett maintains a 3.79 GPA in his senior year as a horticulture major with a pest management minor. He is a member of the Honors Foundations Program at WVU,

the student grotto program, and the American Society for Horticultural Science.

Garrett's advisor Dr. David Davis, plant and soil sciences professor at WVU, spoke highly of his student. “Garrett is a

*Please see SCHOLARSHIP on page 3.*

# Second WV National Guard Landscape and Lawn Training Coming in May

As February gave way to March, WVNLA partnered with the West Virginia National Guard (WVNG) to offer the first Landscape and Lawn Technician Certification Course to our members.



*Landscape and Lawn students follow instructor Scott Byars' (second from right) instructions on how to divide and repot a daylily.*

Because interest in the course is growing, the next course is already scheduled for May 15-19, also in Dunbar, said Cindy Bailey, director of economic development for WVNG.

Scott Byars led the course and taught through both classroom instruction and hands-on demonstrations. Scott is a WVNG trainer, former WVU Extension Service agent and landscape company owner. He aims to provide a solid background in landscape basics, insect and disease management, pruning, lawn care, correct tool use, trees and shrubs and professionalism – just the sort of skills an employer wants in a green industry employee.

Students worked outdoors earlier in the week when the weather was good — pruning, mulching, trimming, working the soil in prep for planting. Scott's approachable style encouraged the students to participate. The members of this first class listened to Scott and asked intelligent and thoughtful questions during a demonstration of dividing a plant and repotting the newly separated divisions.

Attending the course were two Jobs & Hope students and Brandon Cole Ward, who has worked Riverside Sod Farm for nine years. Farm owner Betsy Raynes sent him to the course. He said he learned a great deal about landscaping and gardening from the class. He said he wanted to expand his knowledge of plants and landscaping, but didn't know where to start, and that the class was a perfect place to get a broad overview.

"Cole said the class was helpful overall. He said the talk on professionalism and appearance was especially important...He was glad he took the class and said it would be very helpful for people who didn't have any knowledge of the trade," Betsy said.

The Jobs & Hope attendees had both completed the program and were eligible for employment. Timothy Mosteller was already doing some landscaping work on his own, but thought it would be a good idea to start out working for an established landscaper. He was speaking with an employer who attended the job fair at the end of the course.

"I think it's always a benefit to have a certificate in any job," said Timothy. All program participants are issued a certificate upon completion of the course.

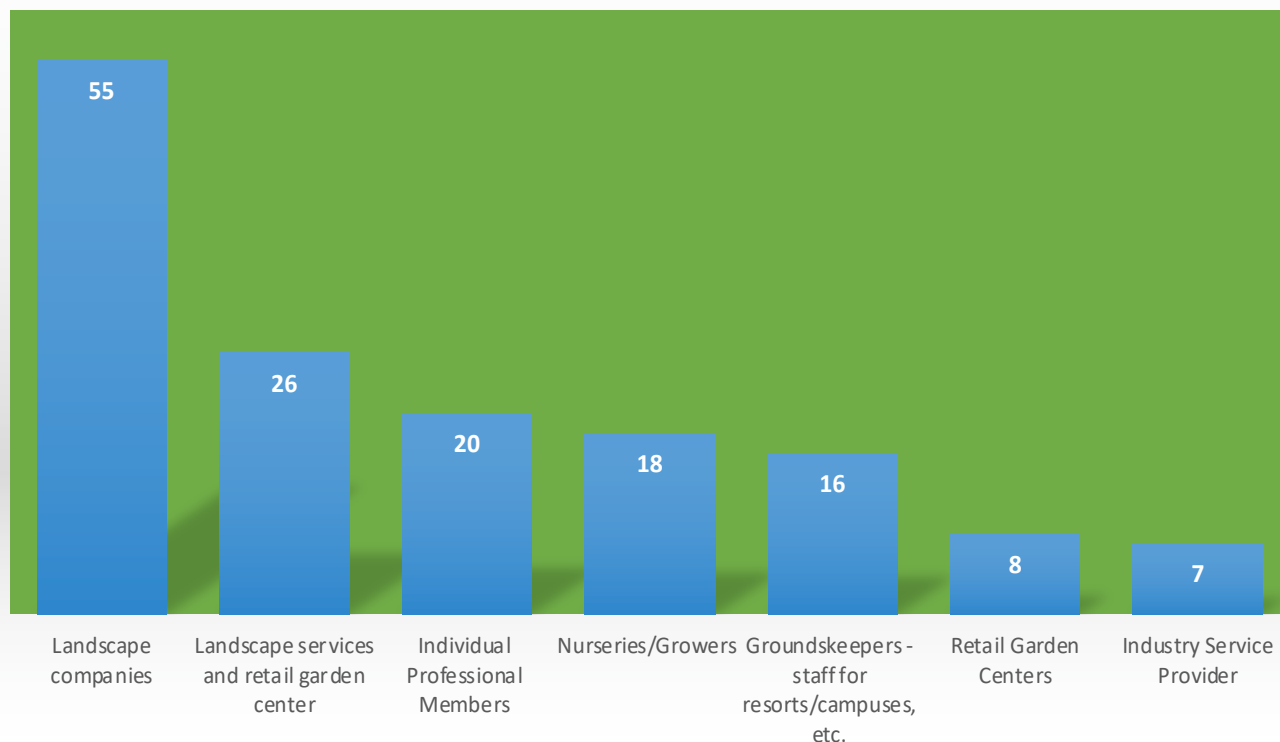
Monica Leigh enrolled in the course because she was interested in greenhouse growing and floral design. At the end of the class, she said she had honed her focus on greenhouse growing and was looking for a job in which to gain skills and experience.

Adam Holtzclaw of The Grounds Guys of Charleston attended the job fair and spoke with the two attendees looking for jobs about opportunities at his company. He planned to make an offer to one of the course participants.

"I loved this training. I think it's a great thing. I would absolutely recommend it as excellent preparation for potential employees," Adam said.

Employers who hire Jobs & Hope WV program participants are eligible for the Jobs & Hope WV – WorkForce WV Employment Program that provides up to 1,040 hours or \$25,000 of salary reimbursement, per employee. For more information, visit [jobsandhope.wv.gov](http://jobsandhope.wv.gov).

## WVNLA Member Breakdown by Category



## SCHOLARSHIP

*Continued from page 1.*

bright student who always has a willingness to learn. He is smart, mature for his age and thoroughly enjoys learning as much as he can about the green industry. He will surely be a leader in the green industry in the future.”

### **Seth Glazer**

Seth says his interest in landscaping was piqued by a landscaping brochure he saw when he was nine years old. The pictures of gardens, gazebos, water features and terracing intrigued him. By the time he was in high school, he was sketching ideas for his parents’ landscape. When he was 16, he began working for customers in Huntington. He designed, pruned, mulched and edged landscape beds. Then, he began to focus on design, culminating in a job including more than 100 plants and a koi pond.

He began his secondary education at WVU in the landscape architecture program. Although his grades were strong, he found that his interest lay in landscape design build, a course offered at Columbus State Community College, where his advisor Richard K. Ansley, PLA, ASLA, recommended him for the scholarship.

“In the classroom, Seth has excelled in his coursework in residential landscape design and plant identification courses. The faculty at CSCC is proud to have a student like Seth Glazer in our landscape program,” Richard said.

Seth was also highly recommended by George Kotalic, of Kotalic Landscaping in Lesage, who met Seth when he came to his nursery. “I realized Seth had a real passion for ornamental horticulture. His customers appreciated his planning and attention to detail. He is conscientious and meticulous,” said George.

WVNLA is pleased to support both Garrett and Seth and wish them the very best as they pursue their green industry careers.

# Why Every Town Needs a Garden Center

By Chris Chanlett

Every town needs a garden center. I know because I had one for 17 years. We closed it in 2015, and have been hearing about it ever since. It just meant so much to people that we offered a good selection of plants, shared our knowledge such as it was, and gave folks a place along the Greenbrier River “to be with nature.”

Every time we hear that from our former customers, we thank them and recount how lucky we were to close when we did. In late June of 2016, the Greenbrier River experienced an overnight inundation for which we could not have prepared. It wrecked our remaining buildings, but stopped short of trashing the river with thousands of pots, labels, bags and accessories.

We count our lucky stars that we had the perfect window on the floodplain that we did when the floods were more normal, out-of-season or minimal.



Torula and Chris Chanlett

It gave us the opening to do the most meaningful work of our lifetimes. A good garden center provides a hub of horticultural knowledge from, “Do you have one of grandma’s snowball bushes?” to “What’s the latest from Proven Winners®?” People told us what plants thrived for them, and as landscape gardeners we told them what they could rely on. Or what to experiment with as

zones were adjusted to accommodate climate change. Or what to plant as a memorial tree.

At Groundworks Nursery, we were growing and landscaping with hundreds of varieties of perennials even before we opened the garden center in 1998. We rode the perennial craze and taught people how maintain them. We expanded our woody plant selection and relished the bonanza of Proven Winners® that improved the performance of annuals.

We were learning to take some responsibility for invasive plants. It was not just the multiflora rose and autumn olive that every farmer hated. It included some of the woody mainstays (barberry, burning bush and Bradford pear) and perennials (ornamental grasses like *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum* ‘Moudry’) that we had made a lot of

money selling. We are so glad now that we do not have to disappoint people with their undesirability.

We learned a lot at MANTS and WVNLA winter meetings, not only about what was new and



Groundworks Nursery, circa 2014.

promising, but also how to control what was rambunctious. How to use pesticides carefully and effectively. Lots of little tricks were shared. How to use basal oil sprays in winter, a practice I now apply relentlessly on the farm to suppress invasives in my pastures.

One of the best lecturers at a winter meeting left me with the memorable line, “We’re not selling plants – we’re selling feelings.” People were connecting to beauty in the natural world and bringing it onto their own property. Maybe it was a tree for long-term shade or an annual for seasonal eye candy. Perhaps they wanted a more ambitious whole landscape design. It was a healthy thing to do — even if it failed.

Unfortunately, economics of this world favor consolidation and gross sales. Big box stores maximize their turnover and chuck what’s left. It is hard to compete with their selection and pricing. What they cannot provide is local knowledge, lore and recognition. People also long for those intangibles in their transactions.

We will admit that operating a garden center built more social than financial capital for us, but I doubt any WVNLA members thought they were launching a get-rich-quick scheme when they went into business. Caring for your communities, human and environmental, will reward you in unexpected ways. Independent garden centers provide a critical, invaluable asset to every town fortunate to still have one.

*Chris Chanlett and his wife Torula ran Groundworks Nursery in Summers County for 30 years. He served on the WVNLA board 2010-2014.*

# Landscape Technician Bootcamp Launches April 17

After months of planning, the curriculum is set, instructors with decades of landscape experience secured, and the equipment for students to get hands-on experience readied.

In partnership with Pierpont Community and Technical College in Fairmont, WVNLA's leaders offer students the perfect background to launch a landscape industry career.

The course runs April 17-21 in both the classroom and on the grounds of Pierpont. The 40-hour class includes a OSHA 10 certification and costs \$598. Tuition assistance is available. These graduates will have the knowledge and experience to make them sought-after employees.

Bobby Gompers, owner of Highland Landscaping in Buckhannon, will demonstrate proper use and safe practices for equipment such as rototillers, power blowers, edge trimmers and aerators. Students will leave the classroom to practice using the equipment on Pierpont's campus.

Justin White, owner of Premier Landscapes in Morgantown, will provide mowing equipment and will instruct the students in hands-on mower operation.

Brothers Michael and Pat Biafore of Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown, will take the students through a day of plant identification and layout, bed preparation for plant installation and techniques, pruning, and maintenance of installed plants. Students will create a landscaped bed on campus. Former landscape company owner and WVU Extension Service agent John Jett will assist.

Betsy Raynes of Riverside Sod Farm, will lead students through unloading a truck bed of sod and installing it on a prepared area, as well as seeding a bare area with grass seed.

The team will also cover proper loading and unloading of trucks for a day's operation, as well as essential equipment to bring to a job for specific tasks. Students will finish the course job-ready, with their own work gloves, pruners, safety glasses and ear protection.

The course concludes on Friday, April 21 with a job fair at 1 p.m. at which area employers are encouraged to interact with the students, accept applications and conduct interviews.

WVNLA, a \$5,000 sponsor, and its members are heavily invested in this program – in time, expertise and equipment. We believe this is a groundbreaking opportunity for our members to find skilled employees.

Sponsorships are available at all levels. Thank

you to **Biafore Landscape Development, Crede Lawn and Landscaping and Riverside Sod Farm** for their \$500 lunch sponsorships. For more information about sponsorships, please contact Julie Robinson at 304-533-1234 or wvnlassoc@gmail.com.

For more information about the Landscape Technician Bootcamp, visit [pierpont.edu](http://pierpont.edu).



## PRESIDENT *Continued from page 1.*

This, in my opinion, should be used as a benchmark for the green industry in West Virginia if we are going to compete against the other trades for quality workers; trust me, it is a competition. However, money is not the only thing people seek in a potential employer. Things like a stable and friendly work environment, continuing education and benefits are other factors that can sway potential recruits and keep them around long-term.

Obviously, if you pay your employees more, you will have to charge more. However, satisfied, efficient and competent employees typically yield better results, and will ultimately make your business more successful. Most other trades have raised their rates to pay their employees, which is why it costs \$85-\$110 per hour to get your car serviced or repaired at the dealership, or to hire a plumber. Let's not undervalue our trade, or our expertise.

So, no matter what part of this great industry you serve, remember that you will need consistent employees this year, the next, and hopefully many years after that! Let's work together to change the perception of employment in the green industry in West Virginia. Remember that your employees are your best advertisement.

*Bobby Gompers is WVNLA president and owner of Highland Landscaping, LLC, in Buckhannon.*



Cary Levenson, Jason Testman and Norman Cole III catch up during lunch.



Attendees talked plants with Chris Higgins (right). They shared a table with WVU horticulture students and Prof. Sven Verlinden.



Mike Wyn and Denny Crede chatted while Zach Crede finished his lunch.

From left, Lisa McDavid, Scott Byars, Cindy Bailey and Nancy Ligus discussed workforce development and training.



## Members Breakfast Meeting and Winter Symposium February 22, 2023



WVNLA president Bobby Gompers presented David Hill with the 2023 WVNLA Outstanding Person of the Year award.



Lisa Roper highlighted each season's beauty in Chanticleer's gravel garden.



Paul Westervelt of Saunders Brothers revealed the best and the not-so-good of new plant varieties.

# We Welcome our New Members

**A Cut Above Lawn Care, LLC***Active member*

Kyle Noble

96 Nixon School Road, Fairmont, WV 26554

acutabovelawncarewv@gmail.com

304-816-7632

*Landscape and lawn maintenance.***Central Supply Company***Associate member*

T.J. Shingleton

4923 Benedum Drive, Bridgeport, WV 26330

304-203-7207

teshingleton@centralsupplywv.com

centralsupplywv.com

*Industrial materials or service provider.***Michael Delong***Individual professional member*

Husqvarna

167 Rum Creek Road, Yolyn, WV 25654

980-240-5055

michael.delong@husqvarnagroup.com

*Industry supplier.***FINN All Seasons***Associate member*

Dave Besoiu

8540 State Rt 14, Suite A, Streetsboro, OH 44241

330-388-3391

dbesoiu@finnallseasons.com

finnallseasons.com

*Industrial materials or service provider.***Mathias Lawn Care***Active member*

Jeff Mathias

129 Larkspur Lane, Shepherdstown, WV 25443

ayrinhubert@yahoo.com

mathiaslawncare.com

540-550-7327

*Landscape architect or designer landscape and lawn maintenance, fertilization and weed control, hardscape design and installation, and landscape and seasonal lighting.***Mean Green Hydroseeding***Active member*

Chris Orinick

1343 Chaplin Road, Morgantown, WV 26501

394-376-0633

meangreenhydroseeding@gmail.com

meangreenwv.com

*Landscape construction, landscape and lawn maintenance, sod farm, industry materials and/or services provider.***Smoot's LLC***Active member*

Wesley Smoot and Thomas Smoot

243 Paynes Ford Road, Martinsburg, WV 25405

304-279-0130

smootsllc@gmail.com

smootllc.com

*Landscape construction, landscape and lawn maintenance, fertilization and weed control, hardscape design and installation, landscape lighting, retail garden center, wholesale nursery.***Stacey Sphuler***Individual professional member*

Labor Consultants International

1831 N. Lakewood Dr., Suite B

Coeur d Alene, ID 83814

208-277-4976

stacey@laborci.com

laborci.com

*Industry service provider.***The "U" Company, LLC***Associate member*

Michelle and Greg Uphold

453 Mae West Road, Confluence, PA 15424

724-329-5627

ucobubba@gmail.com

*Landscape construction.***Whitman Exterminating and Lawn Care***Active member*

Richard Whitman

601 S. Oakwood Ave., Beckley, WV 25801

304-253-3331

whitext@frontier.com

*Lawn and landscape care.*

# WVNLA NEWS

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## Dates to Note

- April 17-21 Landscape Technician Bootcamp**, Pierpont Community & Technical College, Fairmont
- April 28 WVNLA Board Meeting**, Stonewall Resort
- May 15-19 Landscape & Lawn Technician Training**, provided by WV National Guard, Dunbar
- July TBA Pesticide Applicators Recertification session**, Morgantown
- July TBA Certified Professional Horticulturist exam**, Morgantown

## Newly Minted CPH

Congratulations to **Devin Carpenter** of Buckhannon who recently met the requirements to become a Certified Professional Horticulturist.

## Officers & Board of Directors

### *President:*

Robert Gompers – bgompers@aol.com

### *Vice President:*

Jason Testman – jtestman@terracareinc.com

### *Secretary/Treasurer:*

Mark Springer – mark@lavallette.net

### *Past President:*

Stephen Saunders – saunders801@aol.com

### *Board Members:*

Pat Biafore – patrick@biafore.com

Bud Cottrill – westvirginiabud@yahoo.com

Zach Crede – zach@credelawn care.com

David Hill – davidhill.threetrees@gmail.com

John Jett – john.jett@mail.wvu.edu

Lisa McDavid – lisasgardenscapes@yahoo.com

Betsy Raynes – betsyraynes@yahoo.com

### *Executive Director:*

Julie Robinson – wvnlassoc@gmail.com