

President's Message

Hello, and welcome to the second half of the 2023 nursery and landscape season. The first six



*Bobby Gompers
WVNLA President*

months are in the books, and I hope that they were as successful as you had intended them to be.

July is here, which is exciting, yet bittersweet. Exciting, because we all worked hard and powered through another spring season. Bittersweet, because one more year is halfway over, and there is no turning back. Time flies – especially for green industry folks who burn the candle at both ends!

July is the month we celebrate our nation's independence and freedom. It's also a great time to celebrate our businesses and workplaces by reflecting on our successes, and by analyzing our shortcomings. Take stock of your wins and make sure you are celebrating your team victories with your team. Praise them for all of the hard work that they accomplished over the last four months, because we can't thrive without a good team.

Celebrate yourself with a couple days off. July is National Vacation Month. Don't forget to take a vacation of some sort, even if it's just a stay-at-home vacation or a long weekend to recharge the batteries. I believe that we all need to strive for a reasonable work/life balance, which ultimately leads us along a path of fulfillment and productivity.

WVNLA is working hard to provide its members with tools to

Please see PRESIDENT on page 7.

First Rounds of Training Prompt the Scheduling of Additional Courses

If it seems like our newsletters focus heavily on WVNLA's workforce development and training initiatives, it's because we're devoting lots of time, materials and experience to enterprises in this pivotable area. Ask anyone in the green industry to identify the greatest challenge to their business, and the unequivocal answer is, "labor!"

Our spotlight in the last several years has been on two major projects. The first is a launch of a pilot community college Landscape Technician Bootcamp course aimed at providing comprehensive training and tools for anyone considering a green industry career, or for existing landscapers (and their employees) who would like to fine tune their skills.

The second initiative is a collaboration with trainers through the West Virginia National Guard to offer a Landscape and Lawn Training Course. Initially, this course was targeted for Jobs & Hope recovery program participants. The idea was to provide these people with training and skills to make them viable green industry employees. Later, we opened the course up to WVNLA members and their employees to provide a solid background that would enhance their job performance.

Both programs are 40-hour courses, taught by

experienced landscapers. The cost for both courses, when adjusted for WVNLA scholarships, is about \$400.



Bootcamp students install a landscape, with supervision and assistance from Pat Biafore of Biafore Landscape Development and WVNLA board member John Jett.

LANDSCAPE TECHNICIAN BOOTCAMP

Michael and Pat Biafore (Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown), Bobby Gompers (Highland Landscaping in Buckhannon), John Jett (WVNLA board member) and Betsy Raynes (Riverside Sod Farm in Winfield) led the first class of Landscape Technician Bootcamp students through a rigorous, hands-on course April 17-21 at Pierpont Community and Technical College in Fairmont. The

Please see TRAINING on page 2.

TRAINING, continued from page 1.

students also received OSHA-10 training and certification.

The course combined classroom instruction with hands-on experience at various campus sites, and included the installation of a landscape design and a sodded area.



A student prepares a site for a sod installation.

Nancy Ligus, Pierpont's director of workforce, continuing education, and economic development, said students commented after the course that they appreciated the comprehensive coverage of landscape concepts and equipment, the OSHA-10 certification, and the hands-on experience the course offered. They also said they considered it to



Bobby Gompers, (right) owner of Highland Landscaping, reviews safety and operation procedures for power equipment

be a good value for the price.

Based on the that feedback and what they considered to be a significant step forward in WVNLA's workforce development efforts, the instructors and administrators decided to offer another Landscape Technician Bootcamp at Pierpont October 2-6. They'll tweak the marketing plan to better reach a target audience of young people wishing to embark on green industry careers, but the course will be open to anyone, including employers wishing to send existing or potential employees for training.

"I think this session was a big success. We really need to keep the ball rolling," Bobby Gompers said.

On the final day of training, area employers are invited to attend an informal job fair and speak with the students.

LANDSCAPE AND LAWN TECHNICIAN TRAINING

Scott Byars, former WVU Extension Service agent and current landscape business owner, taught the second Landscape and Lawn Technician



Betsy Raynes, owner of Riverside Sod Farm, talks turf with Landscape Technician Bootcamp students.

Training Course May 15-19 in Dunbar. With direction from WVNLA workforce development committee members, Byars developed a course covering landscaping and lawn care basics, equipment safety and operation (both instruction and hands-on learning), insect and disease management, trees and shrubs, pruning, soil basics, plant nutrition, landscaping tools, environmental issues and landscape professionalism.

This course is offered through the West Virginia National Guard, for which Byars is a trainer.

The next Landscape and Lawn Technician course will be offered in late July in Dunbar, and another in September at a location to be announced.

We'll keep you posted.

Mark Your Calendars with These WVNLA Events

July 12 Pesticide Applicators Recertification, 8:30 am to 2:30 p.m.
Holiday Inn, Morgantown

July 20 WVNLA Board Meeting, 10 a.m.
Stonewall Resort

July 12 Certified Professional Horticulturist exam, 3:30 p.m.
Holiday Inn, Morgantown

2024

February 21 Annual Members Breakfast Meeting & Winter Symposium
Embassy Suites, Charleston

Pesticide & Equipment Training for Lawn and Landscape Professionals

**Sponsored by: West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
and West Virginia Department of Agriculture**

When: Wednesday, July 12, 2023 8:30 a.m.

Where: Holiday Inn, 1188 Pineview Drive, Morgantown, WV.

Parking: *Please note this is a different location from previous Morgantown sessions*
Free

Cost: WVNLA members attend free. Charge for non-WVNLA members is \$50.

Lunch: Provided

Recertification Credits: 10 credits will be issued for categories 3, 4A, 4B, 7, 11 and 13C.
Attendees must attend the entire day to receive full credit.

Registration: Pre-registering for this program is required and space is limited. **Online registration is strongly encouraged. Visit wvnla.org.** If you choose to mail your registration form and check made out to WVNLA, please do so before **July 8, 2023**.

Certified Professional Horticulturist exam will be given in the same location at 3:30 p.m. Register online as soon as possible.

Check-in opens at 8 a.m. Schedule subject to change	
8:30 – 9 a.m.	<i>Spray Truck Safety</i> Pat Donnelly, WVU Extension, Health & Safety
9 – 9:30 a.m.	<i>Respiratory Protection</i> Aaron Ondo, WVU Extension, Health & Safety
9:30 – 10 a.m.	<i>OSHA Update</i> Brandon Takacs, WVU Extension, Health & Safety
10 – 10:15 a.m.	Break
10:15 – 11:15 a.m.	<i>Worker Protection Standard and Respirator Fit Test, as needed</i> Tim Young, WVDA – Pesticide Regulatory Programs
11:15 – noon	<i>Pesticide Enforcement</i> Chris Orndorff, WVDA – Pesticide Regulatory Programs
noon – 1 p.m.	LUNCH provided on site
1 – 1:30 p.m.	<i>Rose Pests and Treatments</i> Adam Champ, WVDA – Plant Industries
1:30 – 2 p.m.	<i>Nuisance Vines in the Nursery Landscape</i> Aaron Tumblin, WVDA – Plant Industries
2 – 2:30 p.m.	<i>Pruning to Avoid Diseases and Pests</i> Mira Danilovich, WVU Extension Service

How to Identify and Control Hollyhock Rust

By Adam Champ

Hollyhocks are favored by many gardeners for their cheerful summer blossoms. Unfortunately, these graceful perennials are afflicted with a common and destructive disease called hollyhock rust. The fungi, *Puccinia malvacearum*, is the pathogen responsible for hollyhock rust. Many plants in the mallow family, *Malvaceae*, are susceptible to infection of hollyhock rust, which includes several common weeds. Even though many species are susceptible, hollyhock rust is an autoecious rust, meaning it does not require an alternate host to complete its life cycle like many rust fungi.



Hollyhock infected with hollyhock rust. (Courtesy photos.)

The pathogen survives the winter in hollyhock debris from the previous season and begins producing infectious spores in spring. Spores can be wind-blown, rain-splashed, or moved by people, animals, or tools to nearby hollyhocks. Existing infections will produce more spores from pustules during favorable environmental conditions, leading to secondary infections throughout the growing season.

Symptoms of hollyhock rust include yellow to orange spots on the upper surface of the leaf. Beneath these spots, raised brown pustules will later develop on the undersides of the leaf. As the disease progresses, leaves will wither and eventually defoliate. Plants may blight rapidly under moist and cool environmental conditions, which favor the development of the pathogen.

Cultural controls are important in controlling hollyhock rust. One of the most important cultural controls is removing/destroying hollyhock vegetation

at the end of the growing season to remove inoculum for the following spring. Ideally, you want to destroy old vegetation by burning or deep plowing/burying, but you can also double bag and send to the landfill.

There is a wide variation of genetic susceptibility between varieties of hollyhocks, so using more resistant varieties is encouraged. Remember that 'resistant' doesn't necessary mean 'immune.' Inspect plants at the nursery and only purchase apparently healthy plants.

Avoid irrigation over the plant to keep moisture off the foliage. Irrigating by drip or hose at ground level will help keep the foliage dry. Irrigating in the morning will promote rapid drying of leaves as opposed to evening. Keep proper spacing around the hollyhocks to allow for good air drainage, which in turn will decrease humidity. Controlling weeds around your hollyhocks have the dual advantage of not only improving air drainage, but also removes weed species that may also be hosts of hollyhock rust.

Fungicides are available when chemical control is necessary. Chemical control frequently can't overcome poor cultural controls. A balanced approach of cultural practice and fungicide application is critical to success. Most fungicides are preventative in nature and need to be applied before infection to be effective. Even systemic fungicides, which may have some curative properties, will only help very early in an infection. Apply fungicides before or shortly after infection is observed. Achieving control in the primary infection period early in the growing season will result in reduced disease pressure from secondary infections later in the summer. As with all pesticides, read and follow all directions and precautions found on the label.

Adam Champ is a Plant Regulatory Officer with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture.



Survey Provides Focus for Future Initiatives

Thank you to WVNLA members who recently filled out a survey giving their opinions on the association's top priorities and preferred member communication methods. These results will form the foundation for our strategic communications plan to improve public awareness of the green industry in West Virginia, to promote the professionalism of our industry, to encourage careers in the industry and to recruit new members to our association.

We are looking forward to sharing the results of the survey as well as our path forward, as proposed by the Asher Agency, a public relations firm working with WVNLA's leaders. We've already increased our social media presence, posting frequently on issues relevant to our members. If you haven't followed West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association on our Facebook page, we hope you will soon – and don't be shy about sharing content!

Posts about our members' awards and activities are especially popular. Be sure to let association director Julie Robinson know about any news your company would like to share.

In more traditional media (newspaper, television and radio), we've also made strides. Our workforce development training programs have made the news in local newspapers and radio and television stations. Statewide, listeners to TalkLine with Hoppy Kercheval, tuned in to hear him interview Michael Biafore, WVNLA's workforce development committee chairman. Scholarships that WVNLA awarded to two students were noted in their local newspapers. We're wrapping up several volunteer projects that will make great content for all media formats.

We'll build on the progress we've made, based on what we've heard from you, our members, as we move forward.

Five names were randomly drawn from all the survey participants. They won \$25 gift cards in appreciation for sharing their opinions. Congratulations to: Andrea Landis, Brenda Lilly (Highland Nursery), John Perry III (Grass Busters), Meg Reishman (Bella Gardens), and William Van Tol (Navy Federal).

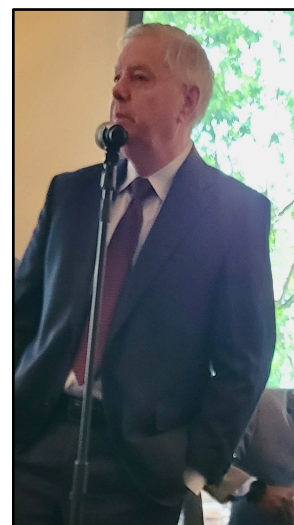
H-2B Proponents Visit West Virginia Senators

On June 13-14, several WVNLA members travelled to Washington DC for a fly-in event in support of H-2B cap relief. Zach and Dennis Crede and Michael Biafore spoke with representatives in both Sen. Capito's and Sen. Manchin's offices, asking for the West Virginia senators' support of this crucial cap relief. Sponsored by the Seasonal Employment Alliance and National Association of Landscape Professionals, the fly-in included more 100 landscape professionals

who advocated for the cap relief provision to remain in the Department of Homeland Security's Appropriations bill.



At left, Michael Biafore, Dennis Crede, Sen. Joe Manchin and Zach Crede take a photo break. Below, the delegation talks H-2B policy with a staff member in Sen. Manchin's office. At top right, Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-SC, speaks to a group of fly-in attendees about his support for the H-2B program. (Courtesy photos)



Member Spotlight:

Smoot's Brings Military Precision to Hardscapes, Landscapes and Water Gardens

It would be difficult to find an enterprise that better embodies the concept of "family business" than Smoot's LLC in Martinsburg. Patriarch Marty Smoot and his son Thomas Smoot started the landscaping business in 2020. Shortly after, Thomas' wife Jessica took over the office management.

Although Smoot's hasn't been in business long, the name was already familiar to Eastern Panhandle residents. Marty, who is a career military man serving in the U.S. Army, started Smoot's Cut-N-Edge in 1993. Thomas learned to drive a zero-turn mower by the time he was eight-years-old. Marty's company evolved into Smoot's Water Gardens and Landscape Nursery, which he operated until 2008 when he returned to the U.S. Army and complete his military career.



From left, Marty, Jessica and Thomas Smoot manage Smoot's LLC.

Thomas served with the U.S. Army in 2009-2011, including a stint in Haiti. He returned home to attend college, earned a bachelor's degree in business management and then opened and operated a lawn maintenance and handyman service for six years. When Marty retired in mid-2020, the father and son joined forces to form Smoot's LLC, offering hardscape installation, landscaping, ponds and fountains, lawncare, maintenance and design services.

The Smoots operated out of their home for the first 1 ½ years. They opened during COVID and found an even larger demand for their services than they expected. They soon enlisted Jessica to handle the office responsibilities.

As business continued to boom, they outgrew their home office and acquired property on which to house their operating base and a nursery/garden center, called HeLP Outlet (an acronym for Hardscapes, Landscapes and Ponds).

The retail nursery/garden center is clearly Jessica's special interest. She helped design every

step of its development and carefully selected employees who are knowledgeable and welcoming to the customers. She relishes the task of sourcing unique products and suppliers and is especially interested in aquatic plants and water gardens. Marty shares her passion for aquatics, and they'd both like for HeLP Outlet to be the largest aquatics supplier in the area.



Water garden installation by Smoot's LLC.

Big, but not too big, Jessica says. "I love the concept of a small, family-owned business. I want to know our frequent shoppers by name. I tell our employees to get to know the customers – ask about their family and their hobbies. That rapport builds relationships and builds our client base," Jessica said.

Following in their father's footsteps, Thomas and Jessica's three children help with the business, especially in the nursery/garden center. They lend a hand, sometimes reluctantly, by cleaning up trash and watering plants. They all love riding on the skid loader, with the elder ones often operating it.

Together, Smoot's service branch and the nursery/garden center employ about 15-20 people. During the busy seasons, they run four to five crews. One concentrates on pond installation and

Please see "SMOOT'S" on page 7.



HeLP Outlet Nursery/Garden Center opened in May.

We Welcome Our New Members

Bel Masso Designs

Active member

Dan Cava

Chad Hefner/General Manager

459 Club View Drive

Bridgeport, WV 26330

304-816-9729

belmassoinfo@gmail.com

Landscape construction, nursery supplies and hardscape materials.

Michael Biafore

Individual Professional member

500 Hartman Run Road

Morgantown, WV 25606

304-594-3006

michael@biafore.com

Landscape architect.

ES Property Services, LLC

Active member

Johnathan Turner

281 Flyer Lane

Bowden, WV 26254

304-704-1119

espropertyservices5@gmail.com

WVNLA Sponsors Speakers for National Convention

West Virginia Garden Clubs, Inc., hosted the national Garden Club, Inc. Convention in May at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs. WVNLA sponsored luncheon speakers for the event, including Jan Bills of Two Women and a Hoe, who had spoken at a previous WVNLA Winter Symposium. Her practical advice, delivered with humor and great photos, impressed the hundreds of attendees.



SMOOT'S *continued from page 6.*



Hardscape installation by Smoot's LLC.

maintenance, another on hardscape installation, one on landscape installation and another on lawn care. Smoot's also offers snow removal services.

Their catchy slogan, "Smoots served their country, now let them serve you!" encourages visitors and customers to the HeLP Outlet on 243 Paynes Ford Road in Martinsburg.

For more information on Smoot's LLC and HeLP Outlet, visit smootsllc.com, call 304-279-0130 or email smootsllc@gmail.com.

PRESIDENT *Continued from page 1.*

work toward that work/life balance, especially in the area of workforce development. We all need to reach out to and involve more green industry businesses with our association. I challenge each of you to encourage at least one new member to join WVNLA this quarter so we can continue to keep our industry moving in a positive direction.

Bobby Gompers is WVNLA president and owner of Highland Landscaping and Highland Nurseries in Buckhannon.

**Register now to take the
Certified
Professional
Horticulturist
exam on July 12
in Morgantown.
wvnla.org**



WVNLA NEWS

P. O. Box 20284
Charleston, WV 25362

Dates to Note

July TBA	Landscape & Lawn Technician Training, provided by WV National Guard, Dunbar
July 12	Pesticide Applicators Recertification session, 8:30 p.m. Morgantown
July 12	Certified Professional Horticulturist exam, 3:30 p.m. Morgantown
July 20	WVNLA Board Meeting, Stonewall Resort
Oct. 2-6	Landscape Technician Bootcamp, Peirpont Community and Technical College, Fairmont
Jan. 10-12	MANTS, Baltimore
Feb. 21	Winter Symposium and Annual Members Breakfast, Charleston

Officers & Board of Directors

President:

Robert Gompers – bgompers@aol.com

Vice President:

Jason Testman – jtestman@terracareinc.com

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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@credelawncare.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