

President's Message

It's 75 degrees and sunny outside. I hear mowers outside cutting grass or mulching leaves, and a motorcycle driving by. I wish we could keep this weather year round. I hope that everyone is being productive and staying healthy, and that you took advantage of our beautiful autumn weather when you could, because it changes quickly.



Bobby Gompers
WVNLA President

Speaking of productivity, WVNLA has really been productive this year. You can read about many of these endeavors in this newsletter. We have focused heavily, as an association, on bringing positivity and awareness to the green industry and also to the career paths available in it. I would like to give a big heartfelt thank you to all who have been contributing time and effort, and also to those who represent our industry in a positive way.

Now is a great time to get more involved in these efforts. Here are some ways to get there:

- Reach out to a board member and let him or her know what interests you. Their names and contact information are listed on page 8.
- Come to the Winter Symposium on Feb. 21 in Charleston.
- Go to MANTS (Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show) Jan. 10-12 in Baltimore. There is no other event that offers as many green industry suppliers and experts in one space. Registration is open at mants.com.
- Read this newsletter.

Thank you. Have a great autumn.

Newly Installed Garden Touches Visually Impaired and Their Families

Community members, patrons, WVNLA members and sixth grade students from Huntington Middle School attended a dedication and ribbon cutting Oct. 16 for a new landscaped outdoor space at the Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind (CWAB) in Huntington.

The natural learning environment, or accessible sensory garden, is made up of several stations, including a gazebo with seating; a sandbox and wood chip box; log slices of various sizes that people can climb or sit on; a grassy area; and a pollinator section that features various types of plants.

The space was created and funded by WVNLA as the joint president's projects of former presidents David Hill and Stephen Saunders. Hill, who designs natural learning environments, proposed the installation to honor a former WVNLA board member, whose daughter received services at the center. Saunders, a subsequent WVNLA president, added the allotment of his president's project to CWAB in honor of his aunt and uncle, who were active there for most of their adult lives.



*Students wander through the sensory garden, with one stopping to feel the velvety leaves of *Stachys byzantina*.*

Many WVNLA

members volunteered their time, equipment and talent in several work sessions to create the space, which "wouldn't have come to fruition if it wasn't for community and community love," Hill said during the event. In addition to Hill and Saunders and his employees, John Perry and six of his GrassBusters employees, Mark Springer, Bud Cottrill and his employees, Eleanor Gould and her friend Maram Moushmouth worked on the site. Hugh Roberts and his carpentry students at Cabell County Career Technology Center built and installed the tresses for the gazebo at the center of the installation.

Please see CWAB on page 2.

CWAB

Continued from page 1.

The space was dedicated to Willis Gene “Buck” and Mary Ann Saunders, Saunders’ uncle and aunt, who were consumers, patrons and supporters of CWAB. It was also dedicated to McKenzie Bartholomew, who received services there before she and her family moved to Florida.

“That is all my parents ever wanted was to have the world be as accessible to the blind as it is to those in the sighted world,” said Teri Saunders Booten, Buck and Mary Ann Saunders’ daughter,



Left to right, garden designer David Hill, Michael Bartholomew and Stephen Saunders flank the sign that honors their families

who attended the event with her sister, Laura Bowen. “Steve and Dave and everyone involved have done their part to make this accessible.”

Michael Bartholomew, McKenzie’s father and former WVNLA board member, also spoke during the event, said he will always be grateful for the dedication.

“This is such an honor that I was not prepared for, but it’s something I will take with me for the rest of my life,” Bartholomew said.

Booten said the dedication was emotional for her.

“My parents were very involved people in advocating for the blind. So they would be very glad and really very humbled by this dedication here, because they never saw themselves as anything special. They were just people who were trying to make the world more accessible for the blind,” Booten said.

Booten, who is a sixth-grade math teacher at Huntington Middle School, was also able to share the experience with her students. She said she wanted them to see and experience something different from their normal.

“Oftentimes, people don’t have any experience with individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment, and part of our job as educators is to help students learn about all types of environments. This was a way to show them that there are other ways to enjoy a garden, a learning environment, besides just by seeing it,” Booten said.

“Now, they’ve been through the garden and have been able to feel that plants feel different. They don’t just look different, they feel different. They smell different. They were able to experience it in a way that wasn’t their usual way of experiencing it,” Booten continued.

Toni Walls, executive director of the CWAB, said the new outdoor space will be primarily for consumers and CWAB staff, but people who rent the association’s activities center could use it, as well.

The garden’s site was a largely unused lot before the WVNLA installation.

“West Virginia’s a relatively rural state, but Huntington is very urban, so it’s really cool to have on our grounds this beautiful natural environment where you can sit and enjoy a cool breeze, or watch butterflies fly through,” Walls said. “Even though our consumers are blind or visually impaired, a lot of them have usable vision and can see a butterfly float by if it’s close enough to them. They can hear the bees in the flowers – and it’s right here.

“If we have a peer support group meeting, they can bring their group out here to sit in the gazebo, and just enjoy it. They don’t have to make arrangements to get to the park. This belongs to them.”

This article includes excerpts from an article that appeared in the Huntington Herald Dispatch.



The natural learning environment and garden on the CWAB grounds provides peaceful green space and seating for patrons.

Winter Symposium Features Variety of Experts

Planning is well underway for WVNLA's 2024 Winter Symposium on Feb. 21 at the Embassy Suites in Charleston. Last year we scheduled our annual members meeting as a breakfast on the same day, providing our members with a chance to connect before heading into the education sessions. We'll continue that plan this year. Members must indicate that they plan to attend at registration.

After a brief business meeting, we'll draw names for door prizes, which last year included electric power equipment for use either on-the-job or at home. We'll offer the door prizes again.

The education sessions will begin immediately after the breakfast at 9:30 a.m. and will feature dual tracks of speakers in WVNLA's usual format, with one lineup focusing on design and the other on business/profit.

On the business side, landscape business guru and motivational speaker Jeff McManus will provide powerful insights on how to grow great workforce teams. Author of the bestselling *Growing Weeders into Leaders*, McManus will present three topics.

- "The GROW System." McManus works from the position that everybody wants to be successful and they can, by recognizing the personal potential. GROW stands for: Great teams, Raising results, Offense scores and Winning attitudes.

- "Crew Leaders Aren't Created – They're Cultivated."

- "How Creating Your Company Core Values Will Attract and Retain Top Talent."

You can get a preview and sense of McManus's philosophy by subscribing to his free blog. Email jeff@jeffmcmanus.com.

For the day's final business session, WVNLA members will hold a roundtable discussion on topics of the most interest to you. Have a suggestion? Email Julie Robinson at wvnlassoc@gmail.com and she'll pass it along.

Design speakers will address landscaping for climate change, tropical plants, pruning techniques and West Virginia's own Little Missy boxwood and its introduction into the European market and famed gardens there.

Kim Eirman, founder of EcoBeneficial, will discuss "Landscape Strategies for Climate Change." Kim teaches at the New York Botanical Garden, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, The Native Plant Center and Massachusetts Horticultural Society. She is the author of *The Pollinator Victory Garden: Win the War on Pollinator Decline with Ecological Gardening*.

Marianne Wilburn, opinion columnist and author of *Tropical Plants and How to Love Them* and *Big Dreams, Small Garden*, will discuss "Playing with Tropical and Subtropical Plants in Temperate Climates." Marianne is a contributing editor at GardenRant.com, where you can find many of her posts.

Former WVNLA president and board member Norman Cole is the third-generation owner of Cole Nurseries in Pipestem. During his career, he has nurtured many boxwood cultivars, but the success of his patented *Buxus microphylla* "Little Missy" has exceeded all expectations. Hear about the plant's development and meteoric climb in popularity, despite the

worldwide threat of boxwood blight. Norman and his wife Missy (the cultivar's namesake) have taken the West Virginia native plant to Europe, where Little Missys thrive in various infected sites around Paris, most notably at the

Luxembourg Gardens, home of the French Senate.

Audra Egan, a regional project manager Davey Resource Group in Ohio, will close out the day with a comprehensive program on pruning. Egan is an ISA Arborist, Certified Pesticide Licensed Applicator in Ohio, and OCNT Master Status with the Ohio Green Industry Association each for over 20 years. She is an active ISA Ohio Chapter member.

Spaces for vendors to exhibit during breaks and lunch will also be available.

Registration opens in January at wvnla.org. Cost to attend is \$50/WVNLA members and \$100/nonmembers. Visit wvnla.org for more information.



Tropicals add exotic flair to this garden. Photo courtesy of Marianne Wilburn.

Landscape Architecture Program Avoids the Chopping Block

Recently, West Virginia came uncomfortably close to losing its only accredited landscape architect program. As part of an effort to reduce its \$45 million debt, West Virginia University (WVU) administrators announced programs and degrees that were recommended for elimination. Both the bachelor's and master's landscape architecture programs landed on the "to be cut" list, while the Plant and Soil Sciences division staff would be cut from 21 professionals to 10. Departments had the opportunity to appeal, but weren't given much time to prepare. They had a week to declare an intention to appeal and several weeks to marshal a defense.

At WVNLA, we heard about the Aug. 11 announcement soon after it was released. After speaking with Michael Biafore, our workforce development committee chairman and a licensed Professional Landscape Architect with a degree from WVU, we decided, with board approval, to write a letter of protest to the review committee.

In addition to speaking of the need for landscape architects by West Virginia engineering, design, and landscape firms, we spoke to the public projects that have been made viable with the expertise provided by WVU's landscape architects.

Excerpts from the letter include:

"I'm writing on behalf of the West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association to express strong disapproval, on behalf of our members, for the proposal to cut the landscape architecture programs and reduce the staff of Plant and Soil Sciences Department at WVU. WVNLA has provided significant support and financial assistance through the years to these programs, largely because we support green industry careers and professionalism throughout the state.

"WVNLA's board members voted to fund these projects because they believe these programs provide vital experiences and education for students in the landscape architecture and horticulture programs. These graduates go on to create designs which landscape and engineering companies use to create effective, safe and attractive spaces throughout West Virginia and beyond. These projects also provide employment opportunities. As the state's flagship, land grant university, WVU should be supporting a program vital to the state's growth, not driving those students to programs in other states."

These (landscape architecture) graduates go on to create designs which landscape and engineering companies use to create effective, safe and attractive spaces throughout West Virginia and beyond.

The letter went out, but the public awareness campaign was just starting. We released the salient points of protest letter to media outlets throughout the state and region, many of whom picked them up and ran them in their publications. Several WVNLA members were enlisted to write letters to their local newspapers. Thank you, Mike Osborne (Beckley – Aspen Corporation); Mark Springer (Huntington – Lavalette Landscaping); Garrett Balog (Charleston – WVU Horticulture student and WVNLA scholarship winner) and Michael Biafore (Morgantown – Biafore Landscape Development).

We asked our members to sign a letter of protest, and also enlisted members of the West Virginia Golf Course Supervisor's Association to sign. We posted updates on social media, namely Facebook (if you haven't followed us on Facebook, we hope you will now!) Michael Biafore spoke eloquently of the landscape architecture programs' importance on WAJR radio program "Talk of the Town."

"We commit and donate countless hours to community involvement and community development across the state," Biafore said. "The landscape architecture department, over the last three years, has touched 30 communities in the

state to help with community development, design, and other needs."

Biafore said on the broadcast that he believes the WVU administration may not fully grasp the impact the landscape architect program has off campus. He believes the value added to local communities by these planning and management services is lost on the decision-makers at WVU.

Dr. Sven Verlinden of Plant & Soil Science made an appeal to reverse the Academic Transformation team's recommendation to remove more than half of its staff. The presentation to the Program Review Appeal Committee prompted committee members to reduce the cuts to 10 instead of 11, but that department will certainly be challenged to meet curriculum and research needs.

Dr. Peter Butler presented an appeal to retain the landscape architecture bachelor's program. To address concerns about the low student-faculty ratio, he proposed the discontinuation of the landscape architecture master's program, which would allow for delivery of the bachelor's program with fewer faculty.

The proposal was met with approval by the

Please see LA on next page.

Capitol Conservation District Loans Kilns for Biochar Production

Sally Shepherd threw the last of some old branches atop a pile of yard waste inside what appeared to be an oversized barrel. She had gathered mostly woody waste material from her farm outside of Sissonville and was preparing to use it to create biochar, a super charcoal made by burning any biomass in an oxygen-starved environment.

Biochar is a potent soil amendment due to its high carbon content, pH, stability, porosity, and surface area.

The large barrel was one of two transportable kilns owned by Capitol Conservation District (CCD). Shepherd, a board member of CCD, obtained the two 8-foot diameter kilns for CCD through a grant from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and West Virginia Conservation Agency. Partnering with CCD for the grant, West Virginia State University (WVSU) is providing research and testing of the biochar. In Charleston, Manna Meal plans to try a burn in its half-acre garden, which provides fresh vegetables for meals for the homeless.

Shepherd would like to see the kilns borrowed by landscapers and farmers as a way to get rid of unwanted organic material, rather than sending the waste to a landfill, where it produces methane gas as it decomposes.

The kiln is composed of double rings of metal, which sit on the ground and deter air from being sucked into the fire, explained Dr. Amir Hass, an associate research professor at WVSU. "The material burning doesn't get much air, so the heat radiates down, burning the material from the top to the bottom. It's a more intense, more efficient burn than simply burning a pile outdoors."

Pyrolysis, or thermal burning, retains carbon in the remaining char. At the end of the burn (about two hours), Hass doused the char with about 400 gallons of water to lock in the carbon.

Although any organic material can be used for a burn, it is important for the material to be dry.

"Farmers and landscapers could stockpile their waste and allow it to dry out. Then they could use one of our kilns to burn it and create biochar," Shepherd said. The biochar could be used in landscaping jobs or sold to customers as a soil amendment.

Biochar must be inoculated or activated before it is added to soil. Without an infusion of nutrients

activation, biochar will actually steal nutrients from soil. There are many recommendations for activation including:

- soaking biochar in a dilute solution of liquid fertilizer 1-3 days before use;
- adding biochar to a compost heap and allowing it to rest for 6-12 weeks;
- steeping it in worm or compost tea;
- mixing biochar into soil six months before planting;
- steeping biochar in urine. Shepherd spreads the char on the floor of her horse stables, where it mixes with equine urine and manure to create inoculated biochar.

For more information or to borrow a kiln, contact Sally Shepherd at 304-545-3145 or salshep@gmail.com.



Dr. Amir Hass ignites the materials in the kiln which will burn to create biochar.

LA Continued from page 4.

appeals board members, who voted unanimously to accept it. "The School made a strong case for retaining the BSLA major by demonstrating it could achieve efficiencies while addressing the needs of landscape architecture students who do not have a similar degree program to pursue here at the

University," said Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Maryanne Reed.

Congratulations to Dr. Butler and his staff in the landscape architecture department who salvaged a program that we consider critical to West Virginia. Not many of the appeals met with success, so this retention is particularly precious.

Student Field Trip Provides Hands-on Teaching Opportunity



David Hill presents his landscape design to sixth grade students.

Before he attended the dedication of the natural learning environment he designed at the Cabell-Wayne Association of the Blind, David Hill talked with sixth grade students from Huntington Middle School about his design process, and, more broadly, green industry careers. Hill engaged the students, who asked lots of questions about his work as a landscaper and hardscape installer. After he spoke, the students boarded school buses for a short drive to attend the dedication (*See story, page 1*), where they explored the installation that Hill had just reviewed with them.

Kudos to Hill for enhancing a middle school field trip and perhaps sparking interest in green industry careers in these students. We sincerely thank teacher Teri Saunders Booten for inviting him to discuss landscape design with the students.

WVNLA strongly encourages its members to make classroom visits such as this to introduce students to the industry. We will provide materials, including hand-outs, videos and digital presentations for speakers. Please contact Julie Robinson at wvnlassoc@gmail.com or 304-553-1234 for more information.

A colorful illustration of a stylized green tree with a white bird perched on a branch. The tree is surrounded by various colorful flowers (blue, orange, pink, yellow, purple) and two blue birds flying in the sky. The background is a light blue gradient with white clouds.

MANTS[®] 2024
JANUARY 10-12 BALTIMORE
 CONVENTION CENTER

visit mants.com

On-line Registration is available
 24/7 beginning late September

THE MASTERPIECE OF TRADE SHOWS[™]

WVNLA Funds Healing Labyrinth Project

Appalachian Behavioral HealthCare director Cheryl Laws had a vision of creating a serene and meditative space for the women in her South Charleston recovery center. The center's spacious grounds offered an ideal, secluded spot for a



The labyrinth provides a place for peaceful reflection.

labyrinth where the women could quietly walk and contemplate. Laws requested funding from WVNLA for the project, which she received.

The site proved challenging due to drainage issues, but Laws prevailed and the labyrinth was

finally laid early this fall. She and her volunteers placed landscape fabric beneath the biodegradable labyrinth template. They placed river rock salvaged from a nearby property along the path's borders, and poured soft crushed glass on the pathway.

Today, the women hear only birdsong as they walk their solitary way through the labyrinth, hoping to find a new life path.



Best Wishes to our Newest CPH's

Congratulations to Josh Evans and Sarah Rigglesman, who both achieved excellent scores on the Certified Professional Horticulturist exam July 12. Along with their experience and education, their passing scores qualify them as WVNLA's newest Certified Professional Horticulturists.

Josh is works in ecological design, sales, and production management for Native Havens, a WVNLA member company in Kearneysville.

Sarah is a senior at Davis and Elkins College and works for WVNLA members Terra Flora Landscaping and Mary's Greenhouse in Elkins.



Don't miss out on what's happening in our industry and our association.



Find and follow us on Facebook and on LinkedIn.

Welcome New Members

Plantscape

Associate member

Tom Horowitz

3101 Liberty Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15021

412-281-6352 plantscape.com

thorowitz@plantscape.com

Interior plant scape services and products.

Andrea Landis

Individual Professional member

293 Eastgate Drive

Morgantown, WV 26508

304-680-2017

alandis1213@gmail.com

**Register now to take the
Certified Professional
Horticulturist
exam on Feb. 22
in Charleston.
wvnla.org**



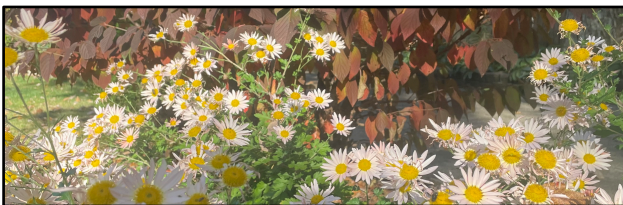
WVNLA NEWS

P. O. Box 20284

Charleston, WV 25362

Dates to Note

- | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jan. 10-12 | MANTS , Baltimore |
| Feb. 20 | WVNLA Board Meeting ,
Charleston, 2 p.m. |
| Feb. 21 | Winter Symposium and
Annual Members
Breakfast , Charleston,
8:30 a.m. |
| Feb. 22 | Pesticide Applicators
Recertification
Training , Charleston
8:30 a.m. |
| Feb. 22. | Certified Professional
Horticulturist Exam ,
Charleston, 4 p.m. |



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@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