

President's Message

Hello WVNLA members. Spring excitement is in the air, as daylight hours stretch longer every day. It's time to get busy! Grass crews will start soon, nurseries are digging and shipping orders, and garden centers are coming out of dormancy. I really feel like this will be a banner year for the green industry in West Virginia as long as the cicadas don't run us out of town. I heard those pesky critters are supposed to hit the southern part of the state this year. That's not good.

As we start this year, let's continue to up the ante of professionalism, education and opportunity in West Virginia's green industries. Don't let employee evaluations slip by without taking the time to sit down with those employees to discuss your expectations, their expectations, and of course salary expectations. We need to keep moving the bar higher for our green industry employees with better education, more opportunities and **better wages**. \$15 an hour is a great starting wage, especially for young people or individuals that will require training.

The WVNLA board has been staying busy planning workforce development initiatives, coordinating events with young

Please see **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN** on page 6.



Bobby Gompers
WVNLA President

2025 Outstanding Person of the Year Award Goes to Longtime Turf Expert Charlie Price

The naming of Charlie Price as WVNLA's Outstanding Person of the Year drew smiles from everyone attending the Annual Member's Meeting and Breakfast on Feb. 11. Betsy Raynes of Riverside Sod presented the award to Charlie, her long-time mentor. She spoke of the many years he contributed to the nursery and landscape industry in West Virginia.

As a long-term member and former officer of WVNLA, Charlie was instrumental in establishing the Association as a co-owner in MANTS. He worked tirelessly with the legislature to establish a Landscape

Architecture certification in West Virginia. He holds the second Landscape Architecture license issued in the state. For many years, Charlie was the leading sod grower and supplier in West Virginia and continues to consult on turf maintenance and planting issues for municipalities and other groups.

"Charlie is a legend in the turf industry, where he is often referred to as 'Sod Father.' We wish Charlie success in all that he approaches and are thankful to him for his contributions to this organization and to the world around him," the award reads.



Charlie Price accepts his award.



From left, Michael Dick, Philip Smith, Dave Barnett, Linda Bagby, Ed Mason and John Jett catch up over breakfast at WVNLA's annual members meeting.



President Bobby Gompers opened the day's activities.



WVNLA's 2025 scholarship recipients traveled to Charleston to attend.



WVU Landscape Architecture professor Peter Butler discussed the history of landscape design.

Insights Shared and Connections Made at 2025 Winter Symposium

Attendees who braved the predicted snowfall to attend WVNLA's Winter Symposium on Feb. 11 in Charleston were rewarded with a chance to connect with friends new and old, to hear insightful speakers and to do a little business with the vendors on hand.

Landscape design for fragrance, biochar, the history of landscape design and innovations in outdoor lighting captured the attention of those who chose to hear speakers in the design track. Business track speakers focused on the design/build process, tips and rules for growing their businesses legally and professionally and how to harness Artificial Intelligence and social media to capture new customers.

"This was a really great opportunity for anyone wanting to take their business to the next level to hear about the tax, licensing and labor requirements they need to meet," said WVNLA president Bobby Gompers. "We want to help our members grow their businesses, while encouraging professionalism in our industry."

Thank you to our door prize donors and to Lisa McDavid for coordinating:

Husqvarna Group
Lake County Nursery
Valley Gardens

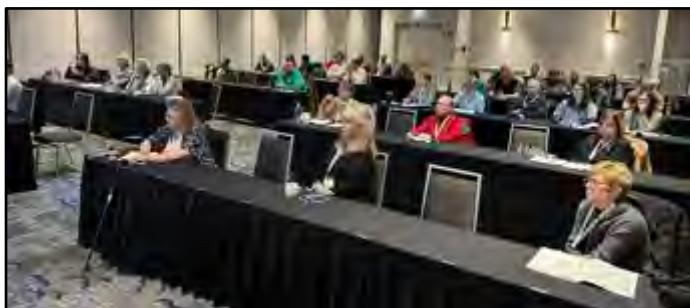
Plans are already underway for our 2026 symposium. If you have suggestions, we'd love to hear them. Email: wvnlassoc@gmail.com



Lisa McDavid (center) and Dave Hill (right) emceed the door prize drawing.



Michael Biafore, Hayden Swain and Joelle Wolfel visited during lunch.



Design session attendees paid close attention to an engrossing presentation.



Betsy Raynes, Brett Merritt and Ethan Merritt caught up during a session break.

WVNLA Gifts and Scholarships Provide Continued Financial Support to WVU's Davis College

By Sophia Darmelio

WVU Marketing

The West Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association (WVNLA) has been providing financial support to the West Virginia University Davis College of Agriculture and Natural Resources for more than 25 years. These funds sustain students majoring in horticulture and plant sciences and landscape architecture. Recently, the WVNLA gave \$10,000 to support student travel and class supplies for the two programs.

Sven Verlinden, program coordinator of horticulture and plant sciences and associate professor of horticulture, has had a long relationship with the WVNLA, dating back 25 years. Throughout this time, the WVNLA has been a constant source of support, providing funding for these two Davis College programs.

"The continued support of these programs allows us to provide students with unique out-of-class travel and experiential learning opportunities by reducing the cost to students," Verlinden said. "The funding allows all students access to the wonderful opportunity to travel, whether it is international or to the annual landscaping competition."

The most recent gift will go toward reducing the cost of student travel expenses for a three-week Western Europe trip to which Verlinden and Peter Butler will guide students and for the National Collegiate Landscape Competition.

"Receiving funding to go on the Western European trip really benefited me. I never thought I would have gone across the world this early in my life," Chris Garrison, senior horticulture and plant sciences major, said. "As a horticulture major, it was wonderful to see so many plants, including native plants, in bloom and to experience a landscape that is different from the United States. It was truly a life-changing experience."

With the help of funding provided by the WVNLA, each year several Davis College students attend the National Collegiate Landscape Competition, an event where students showcase their skills in landscaping, horticulture and irrigation.

Colin Krisulevicz, a senior horticulture major, has had the opportunity to attend the competition twice, thanks to support from the WVNLA.

Krisulevicz said his experiences at the competition were some of the best moments of his college career. Before attending the competition, he

was not as enthusiastic about landscaping as he is now, explained Krisulevicz. After the competition, Krisulevicz realized how large and unique the landscaping industry is, and that it is an art form, offering a career of which to be proud.

"Simply put, without the scholarships from the WVNLA, the National Collegiate Landscape Competition would not have happened for me," Krisulevicz added. "Without the generous donations



Student crew members work on a hardscape installation at a previous National Collegiate Landscape Competition.

to our team, I could not have gone to either competition and made the memories, learned the skills and put myself out there like I did. It means a lot to me that an organization that does not even know who I am believes in giving toward an opportunity such as this."

In addition to the recent gift for student travel, the WVNLA provides funding each year to support student scholarships and a variety of other causes. The Marcus W. Rennix Scholarship is awarded to several landscape architecture and horticulture students to help with school expenses. The newly created George W. Longenecker Scholarship offers four semesters of full-tuition reimbursement for a high school senior accepted into the landscape architecture or horticulture programs. The goal of this scholarship is to encourage West Virginia high school students to consider careers in these areas. Longenecker was instrumental in developing the landscape architecture program at WVU in the 1960s.

"Education is a critical part of WVNLA's mission, as is encouraging students to consider careers in nursery, landscaping, greenhouse

Please see DAVIS COLLEGE GIFTS on page 6.

Job Board Provides Members with a Tool to Make Hiring Happen

It's hiring time. Are your crews staffed?

If not, why not post your available positions on WVNLA's Job Board on our website? There is no charge for WVNLA members to post a listing.

Give it a try following these steps.

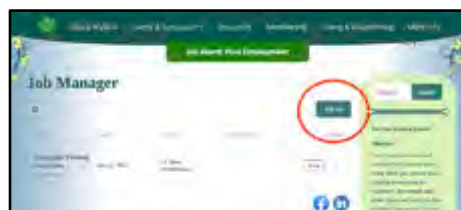
1 Go to <https://wvnla.org/wp-admin> in your web browser. You should bookmark this link, as there is no link to it on the site, for security reasons.



Login using your login credentials. (If you need to register, contact Julie Robinson at

304-553-1234 or wvnlassoc@gmail.com, who will send you the registration link.)

304-553-1234 or wvnlassoc@gmail.com, who will send you the registration link.)



2 You will be redirected to the "Job Manager" page. Click the "Add Job"

button to create a new job listing.

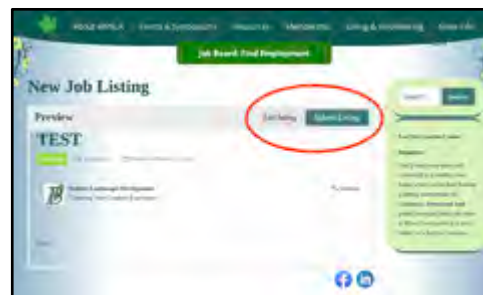


3 Fill in the fields on the Job Listing Form, then click "Preview and Submit" at the bottom of the page.

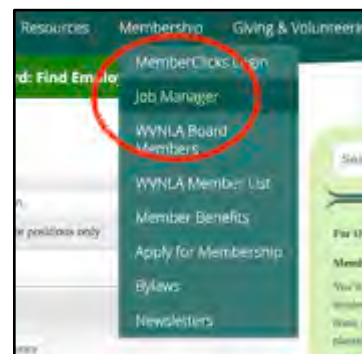
4 If you need applicants to upload certification documents, then after the "Application Form," choose "Form with Certifications Text Area" instead of "Simple Form."



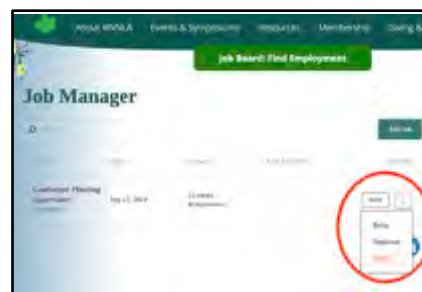
5 Preview the new Job Listing. If you want to make changes, click "Edit Listing." If all is well and you want to make the listing active, click "Submit Listing."



6 To return to the "Job Manager" page at any time go to the "Membership" menu and choose "Job Manager."



7 Modify or delete your job listing in Job Manager



WVNLA Members are in the News on Various Fronts

Officers elected for 2025-26 term

Officers for the 2025-26 term were elected at the Annual Members Meeting and Breakfast on Feb. 11 in Charleston.

President: **Bobby Gompers**

Vice President: **Jason Testman**

Secretary/Treasurer: **Mark Springer**

After board members serve their initial three-year term, they may choose to leave the board or remain. If they choose to remain, WVNLA members vote each year on their retention. A roating schedule of four is used. This year, **Pat Biafore**, **Bud Cottrill**, **John Jett** and **Mark Springer** were approved to remain on the board of directors.

We thank our officers and board members for the time and expertise they share with our Association.

CPH Congratulations

Congratulations to our newest Certified Professional Horticulturists, **Michael Biafore** and **Bradley Gritt**. Both achieved this status when they passed the CPH exam on Feb. 12. Michael is the president of Biafore Landscape Development LLC in



Michael Biafore

Morgantown and serves on the WVNLA's board of directors. He also chairs the workforce development and scholarship committees.

Brad is the general manager of Gritt's Farm in Buffalo.

The next CPH exam will be at a place and time to be determined in July 2025. For more information on the certification, visit wvnla.org.



Bradley Gritt

In Memory of James E. Monroe, Sr.

It is with sadness that we note the Dec. 21 passing of **James E. Monroe, Sr.** of Hinton, a devoted plantsman, Greenbrier Nurseries founder, and long-time West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association and Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show board member and leader. His contributions to the industry were numerous and valuable.

"Jim was a mentor of mine when I first became involved with the West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association. He took me under his wing

from day one. Served on many board meetings with him on the WVNLA and Mid-Atlantic Nurserymen Trade Show. A kind and gentle man who taught me a great deal. I've never heard anyone say a bad remark about him. I know he is resting in peace," said **Aaron Helmick**, retired, former owner of Joseph Nurseries in Bridgeport.

Industry Reps Tout H2B Reform



Green industry advocates traveled to Washington DC in December to advocate with members of Congress for H2B Visa reform. WVNLA board members Zach Crede and Michael Biafore (second and third from right) were part of a group that met with Sen. Joe Manchin, I-W.Va.

West Virginia Botanic Garden Names Betsy Raynes to Board

Congratulations to **Betsy Raynes**, who has recently accepted the position of ex-officio board member representing WVNLA on the West Virginia Botanic Garden board of directors. She replaces **Pat Biafore**, who served in that capacity for many years.



Jason Testman (left) and Julie Robinson recently discussed the green industry when they appeared on Highlights, a weekly community program hosted by Jim Strawn

DAVIS COLLEGE GIFTS

Continued from page 3.

production and other green industry sectors,” Julie Robinson, executive director of WVNLA, said. “WVU has the state’s only accredited landscape architecture program, and we strive to enhance this program, as well as the horticulture and plant sciences program. Current students are the industry’s future. It is our hope that these graduates will someday choose to establish their careers in the state.”

Hailey Lane, a senior studying horticulture, was one of five WVU students awarded the Marcus W. Rennix Scholarship this year. Lane will be using the scholarship funds toward the Western Europe trip.

“It means absolutely everything to me to be able to have this opportunity and be able to fund it,” Lane said. “The WVNLA has helped me and many other young adults be able to pursue our passions and dreams.”

Many students have benefited from these scholarships and without their support, these programs would not be able to offer as many experiential learning and travel opportunities as they do, explained Verlinden.

“The relationship with WVNLA is very important to the Davis College in supporting recruitment and retention through scholarships and supporting experiential learning,” Butler, Extension specialist and professor of landscape architecture, said. “To provide all this support is a great recruitment opportunity, putting landscape architecture and horticulture front and center.”

Kiersten Smith, a freshman studying horticulture and plant sciences, was one of this year’s recipients of the George W. Longenecker Scholarship. As a first-generation college student, this scholarship will allow Smith to focus completely on her studies and provide financial relief.

“This scholarship means so much to me because it alleviates the financial burden of my education, validates my dedication to the horticulture field and motivates me knowing I have the support of a wonderful association,” Smith said. “The WVNLA’s commitment to supporting students in horticulture and landscape architecture is truly commendable and makes a significant difference in our academic and professional journeys. This scholarship has greatly enhanced my experience at Davis College, and it has inspired me to give back and contribute to the horticulture field.”

Donations from the WVNLA help to reduce the cost for students to participate in these opportunities. Butler explained that he cannot say enough about the generosity the WVNLA has shown

toward the horticulture and landscape architecture programs over the years.

To learn more about Davis College, visit davis.wvu.edu. Keep up with the latest updates and news on Facebook, X, Instagram and YouTube by following @WVUDavis.

Copies of Landscape Plants for West Virginia Available to our Members

By now you should have received a copy of *Landscape Plants for West Virginia* through USPS. If you own a garden center and would like to receive additional copies to distribute to your customers, please let us know. Each box contains 60 copies. We also have copies available to our members for use as a resource in their businesses. For more information, or to order copies, email wvnlassoc@gmail.com or visit our wvnla.org.



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN *(Continued from page 1)*

folks in the state, and getting ready to ramp up our efforts to increase membership numbers. Stay tuned for more information on opportunities there.

Lastly, I hope everyone is taking advantage of the new *Landscape Plants for West Virginia* that was published this year. It is a great tool and resource to have at your disposal. My customers absolutely love them. I keep a stack in the truck, and I encourage you to do the same. We are definitely fortunate to have these types of tools in the tool belt.

I hope you have a great spring season!

Bobby Gompers is WVNLA president. He owns Highland Landscaping and Highland Nursery in

WVNLA Celebrates its 85th Anniversary

Did you know that WVNLA was created 85 years ago in 1939? The concept of residential landscaping in the United States was just taking off and the demand for tree, shrub, and herbaceous plant species was growing at the time. Many states had already formed their own associations when a group of West Virginia nurserymen with the backing of West Virginia University and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, banded together to form a state association for West Virginia's budding nursery industry.

West Virginia Nurserymen's Association was formed on July 1, 1939, when 26 men contributed \$2 each and formed an organization of nurserymen. The first meeting was held in Elkins.



In celebration of WVNLA's 85th anniversary, we'll explore the organization's history as it grew in numbers and diversity. We need your help! If you have a memory or photo to share, we'd love to use it in future issues of this newsletter and on Facebook. We aren't going to hear from any of the founders, certainly, but some of you are second- or third-generation members who might recall a story or two from the early days.

And it doesn't have to be that early. We'd like to hear about anything you consider memorable. These past events might even inspire some future activities and outreach for WVNLA.

Please email anything you'd like to share to wvnlassoc@gmail.com.

Please Welcome our Newest Members

Greenscape Landscape and Nursery

Active member

Jimmy Dickson

1278 Gihon Road

Parkersburg, WV 26101

304-428-5926

greenscapelandscapewv@gmail.com

greenscapelandscapewv.com

Landscape architect or designer, landscape construction and maintenance, landscape lighting, irrigation, retail garden center, industry materials and/or services provide, snow removal.

Hometown Outdoor Living

Associate member

Thomas Murray

435 Fayette Springs Road

Chalk Hill, PA 15421

724-437-2063

tmurray.hls@gmail.com

Retail garden center.

Landscape Hub

Associate member

Lisa Fiore

2045 W. Grand Ave. Suite B

PMB 97272

Chicago, IL 60612-1577

Seasonal lighting, industry materials and/or services provider.

Mountain Girl Provision Company

Associate member

Kristi Moss Ruggles

578 Cedar Riffle Road, Greenup, KY 41144

304-552-3197 mtnmomma61@hotmail.com

Retail garden center, educator.

Wheeling Park Commission

Active member

Ryan Wilson

465 Lodge Drive, Wheeling, WV 26003

oglebay.com

rwilson@oglebay.com

304-243-4000

Public space landscape administrator/maintenance.

WVNLA NEWS

P. O. Box 20284

Charleston, WV 25362

Dates to Note

- | | |
|----------|--|
| April 17 | WVNLA Board Meeting,
Stonewall Resort, 10 a.m. |
| July TBA | Pesticide Applicators
Recertification and
Certified Professional
Horticulturist Exam,
Morgantown |



Officers & Board of Directors

President:

Robert Gompers – bgompers@aol.com

Vice President:

Jason Testman – valleygardensjt@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer:

Mark Springer – mark@lavalette.net

Past President:

Stephen Saunders – saunders801@aol.com

Board Members:

Michael Biafore – michael@biafore.com

Pat Biafore – patrick@biafore.com

Bud Cottrill – westvirginiabud@yahoo.com

Zach Crede – zach@credelawncare.com

David Hill – davidhill.threetrees@gmail.com

John Jett – drjohnjett@gmail.com

Lisa McDavid – lisasgardenscapes@yahoo.com

Betsy Raynes – betsyraynes@yahoo.com

Executive Director:

Julie Robinson – wvnlassoc@gmail.com

Happy Spring!