

President's Message

As we move into the heart of the season here in West Virginia, I'm reminded of just how resilient and vital our green industry continues to be. Spring always brings a renewed sense of



Robert Gompers
WVNLA President

optimism—long days, fresh growth and the opportunity to make a lasting impact in our communities.

Across the state, our members are hard at work, whether it's maintaining

landscapes, growing quality nursery stock or helping customers create spaces they take pride in. What we do matters.

We are not just in the business of plants—we're in the business of improving quality of life, strengthening property values and enhancing the natural beauty of West Virginia.

As an association, WVNLA continues to focus on supporting our members through education, advocacy and connection. From legislative awareness to workforce development, our goal is to make sure your voice is heard and your business has the tools it needs to succeed. The challenges we face, such as labor, input costs and market uncertainty, are real, but so is the strength of this group.

I also want to encourage everyone to stay engaged. Whether that means attending upcoming events, participating in conversations or simply reaching out to a fellow member, your

Continued on page 2.

Certification Super Stars

At Native Havens, certification matters.

Of the eight employees, four are Certified Professional Horticulturists (CPH). Founder James Dillon holds a Pennsylvania certification and three team members are certified in West Virginia. They are Josh Evans, Skylar Welch and Chris Stryker. "That means 50 percent of our staff hold CPH credentials and that brings us a lot of pride," said James.

With half of its employees achieving CPH status, Native Havens has the highest percentage of professionally certified employees among WVNLA member companies with more than five employees.



James Dillon



Josh Evans



Skylar Welch



Chris Stryker

Native Havens is an ecological landscape design company in Kearneysville. They emphasize native species in the diverse designs they install and maintain.

"Plant knowledge is the core of our business niche. We intentionally hire people who value learning and professional growth, and certifications give clear benchmarks for that growth. At Native Havens, earning a CPH prepares staff for higher-responsibility roles," James said. He explained that a CPH at Native Havens is positioned to step into the Conservation Landscape Specialist/Gardener position, which carries greater pay and responsibilities than entry-level landscape labor.

Please see NATIVE HAVENS on page 2.

Congratulations to 2026 George W. Longenecker Scholar

Joseph Brown has been selected as WVNLA's 2026 George W. Longenecker Scholarship winner. Joseph an incoming West Virginia University



Joseph Brown

freshman accepted into the Landscape Architecture program at WVU's Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design.

Joseph is a home-schooled high school senior from Flemington. When informed of his selection, Joseph said, "Wow!! Thank you so much! I am

honored to be chosen as the recipient of this generous scholarship. I am excited to begin college at WVU, and this funding is invaluable for my success. Thanks to you, what was fear and anxiety has turned to hope and joy as this life-changing opportunity is gifted to me."

This scholarship provides full tuition reimbursement to a West Virginia resident for four semesters as long as the recipient maintains a 3.0 GPA and remains enrolled in the program. The scholarship was created in 2024 in memory of George W. Longenecker who dedicated a lifetime to the study and mentorship of landscape architecture. He was a long-time Horticulture professor and was instrumental in developing the Landscape Architecture program at West Virginia University. He founded and led the effort to organize and establish the West Virginia Botanic Garden in Morgantown.

NATIVE HAVENS *Continued from page 1.*

Certifications also reinforce Native Havens' mission, which is to use plants to improve lives, support pollinators and benefit the planet. Employees who understand plants, weeds, invasives and ecology differentiate Native Havens' design, installation and maintenance work from many competitors. "Personally, the pride I felt receiving my certificate is something I want for every team member," said James. "It signals a commitment to

the industry and to quality work."

Native Havens promotes its team members who have achieved professional certification, featuring them on their website and including their continuing education and certification updates in their annual client newsletter. While clients ultimately judge Native Havens by knowledge and final results, James said having certified employees has been the single most important factor in establishing legitimacy and commitment to quality.

Supportive as he is of the CPH program, James would like to see it evolve with a more robust curriculum and CEU reporting that would keep certified professionals current with industry trends. He believes that a CPH signals more than interview talk to employers — it signals a demonstrated, ongoing dedication to plant knowledge.

"Strengthening the program will help the entire industry hire and retain talent necessary to support ecological design, installation, and maintenance," James said.

CPH certification is obtained through education, experience and successful passage of the CPH exam. The exam consists of 100 multiple-choice questions based on material covered in the CPH study manual and 25 plant identifications. The study manual costs \$60 for WVNLA members and \$100 for non-members. Exam fee is \$25. The next exam will be administered August 12 at Glade Springs Resort in Daniels. For more information, visit wvnla.org.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN *Continued from page 1.*

involvement is what makes this organization strong. The relationships within WVNLA are among our greatest assets.

Finally, I want to thank each of you for the work you do every day. This industry is built on dedication, early mornings and a commitment to excellence. It does not go unnoticed.

Wishing you all a safe, productive and successful season ahead.

Sincerely,
Robert Gompers

Robert is president of WVNLA and owner of Highland Landscaping LLC and Highland Nursery in Buckhannon.

Professor Details the State of Affairs in WVU's Horticulture and Plant Sciences Departments

By Sven Verlinden

Greetings from Morgantown,

We are pleased to share some of the exciting developments in the Horticulture and Plant Sciences program at West Virginia University. We currently have 42 undergraduate students and three graduate students, with many additional students minoring in horticulture. Our courses remain well-enrolled and are popular not only among our majors, but also with students from other disciplines such as business and agricultural education.

With the continued support of the West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association, we have been able to provide students with valuable experiential learning opportunities, including study abroad travel, field trips and participation in the Association's Winter Symposium. Our field trip to Phipps Conservatory and the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium continues to be a student favorite.

Our recent graduates have gone on to successful careers as greenhouse growers, educators, landscapers, public horticulturists, Department of Agriculture inspectors and produce growers. Several alumni have also pursued advanced degrees at WVU and other institutions, working toward Master of Science degrees. We are especially proud of our students' accomplishments in securing scholarships and internships. Most recently, one of our students, Liam Obenshain, was accepted to work with the Smithsonian orchid collection in Washington, D.C.

Looking ahead, we are excited to once again offer a study abroad experience in western Europe this summer—an opportunity made possible through your continued support. We are also preparing for the upcoming academic year, including recruiting students for the National



Students enrolled in a Greenhouse Management course at WVU visit Green Circle Growers' greenhouses in Oberlin, Ohio.

Collegiate Landscape Competition in 2027, planning a potential Horticulture Club trip to Hawaii in Fall 2026, and implementing a landscaping project at the West Virginia Botanic Garden.



WVU Horticulture students visit Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh for an insider tour led by alumnus Laken Burns.

We continue to actively recruit prospective students through high school visits, major fairs, and outreach events such as WVU Decide Day. One area where we see strong potential for collaboration is in connecting high school students interested in the green industry with our program. You may already be employing some of these students this summer—encouraging them to consider horticulture as a major is a simple yet impactful way to help cultivate the next generation of professionals in our field.

Research within the Horticulture and Plant Sciences program spans a wide range of topics, including evaluation of new plant materials for West Virginia and specialty crops such as hops, saffron, cider apples, and indigo for dye production. We are deeply appreciative of the research funding support provided to our faculty and look forward to sharing our findings at the next Winter Symposium.

While the program has experienced its share of challenges over the years, our enrollment remains steady, and our commitment to inspiring students to pursue careers in the green industry is stronger than ever. Please feel free to reach out with any questions, ideas, or suggestions as we continue working together to build one of the premier horticulture programs on the East Coast.

Dr. Sven Verlinden is Program Coordinator of Horticulture and Plant Sciences, and Associate Professor at WVU.

Latest Edition is Here – Get Them While You Can

On the heels of distributing all 5,000 copies of our first edition of *Landscape Plants for West Virginia* last summer, we have printed a 2026 edition and are again making them available to WVNLA members and the public. Please let us know if you would like to receive extra copies for your clients or your employees.

GARDEN CENTER MEMBERS: We are relying on you to get these books to your customers. If you would like to be a distribution site for the books,



please email wvnlassoc@gmail.com and let us know how many boxes you would like to receive. There are approximately 50 books in each box. We will publicize their availability at your location, perhaps bringing you new customers.

The books proved to be a big draw last year, with customers seeking them out. An employee at Gritt's Farm at Charleston's Capitol Market said they have daily requests for the books.

So far, the books are available at:

- Freed's Greenhouse, Bridgeport
- Gritt's Farm, Charleston
- Gritt's Midway Greenhouse, Charleston
- Groundbreaker, West Union
- Greenbrier Valley Home & Garden Tour (June 13), Lewisburg
- Kim's Greenhouse, Milton
- Mary's Greenhouse, Elkins
- Modern Homestead, Reedsville
- Putnam County Landscape, Winfield
- Smoot's, Martinsburg
- TerraCare, Charleston
- Valley Gardens, Charleston
- West Virginia Botanic Garden, Morgantown

Donation Honors the Memory of Norman Cole, Jr.

It was with sadness that we noted in February the passing of Norman Cole, Jr. Norman's contributions to West Virginia's green industry left a lasting mark on our association and our community.

Norman Cole, Jr., a second-generation nurseryman, contributed significantly to the West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association (WVNLA), serving as president and a long-time member. He served as president of the Southern Nursery Association and a MANTS board member. His son Norman Cole III continues the family tradition as owner of Cole Nurseries and Little Plants, LLC in Pipestem, WV, along with his wife, Missy.

To honor his memory, WVNLA is making a donation to the West Virginia Botanic Garden in Morgantown, as directed by the Cole family.

"It's a true honor for the West Virginia Botanic Garden to receive this memorial gift from the WVNLA in memory of Norman Cole, Jr. His

contributions helped shape West Virginia's nursery and landscape industry, and it's meaningful to see that legacy continue through support of public horticulture. We're grateful to be part of a statewide community that shares a commitment to plants, education, and the landscapes that define our home," said Philip Smith, WVBG Executive Director.



Norman Cole, Jr.

Three join the ranks of Certified Professional Horticulturists

Congratulations to our most recent Certified Professional Horticulturists, who met



Jessi Hersom

the requirements for certification when they passed the exam on Feb. 19. Best wishes to: **Jessi Hersom**, City of Morgantown – Urban Landscapes;



Chris Stryker

Chris Stryker, Native Havens in Kearneysville; and **Ryan Wilson**,

Wheeling Park Commission in Wheeling.

The next exam will be administered in August 12 at Glade Springs. announced.



Ryan Wilson

Please Welcome WVNLA's New Members

Andy Dobreff

Individual Professional member

111 Market St.
Mannington, WV 26582
304-476-0315
adobreff@frontier.com

304-544-6559

Landscape construction, landscape and lawn maintenance, hardscape design and installation, landscape lighting, irrigation and snow removal.

Jimbo's All American Landscaping

Active member

James Peterson
235 Tributary Trail
Falling Waters, WV 25419
304-886-7491
jimboallamericanlandscaping@yahoo.com
Landscape and lawn maintenance, landscape lighting

The Perennial Farm

Associate member

Richard Watson
12017 Glen Arm Rd
Glen Arm, MD 21057
410-592-6106
perennialfarm.com
mike@perennialfarm.com
Wholesale nursery

Never Deer LLC

Active member

James Stanton
2 Shamblin Place, Charleston, WV 25314
304-395-3546 james@neverdeer.com
Industry supplier

Verona Hills Design & Landscape

Associate member

Tony Parks
PO Box 1157 or 15815 Ensor Mill Rd
Sparks, MD 21152
443-831-6251
tonyparksplants@icloud.com
Landscape design, landscape and lawn maintenance, fertilization and weed control, hardscape design and installation, wholesale nursery, Certified Professional Horticulturist (MD)

Nick Oxendale

Individual Professional member

1011 Olive St.
Baltimore, MD 21230
nickoxendale@gmail.com
301-455-7782
Landscape architect

U.S. Lawns

Active member

Morgan Clyde
500 Hartman Run Road
Morgantown, WV 26505
304-816-7270 michelle.clyde@uslawns.com
uslawns.com
Lawn and landscape maintenance, landscape construction, arborist, hardscape design and installation, irrigation, snow removal

Pioneer Landscaping and Lawn Service

Active member

James Lester II
1960 Millers Fork Road
Wayne, WV 25570
jamesg3410@gmail.com



Board members and officers attending the symposium



Visiting vendors



Keynote speaker Jeff Butler

**2026 Winter Symposium, Feb.17
Embassy Suites, Charleston, WV**



Cary Levenson and Mark Springer talk shop.



Robert Gompers and Lisa McDavid emcee.



2025 GWL scholarship winner Adaline Cumpston

Board of Directors Position Change and Appreciation

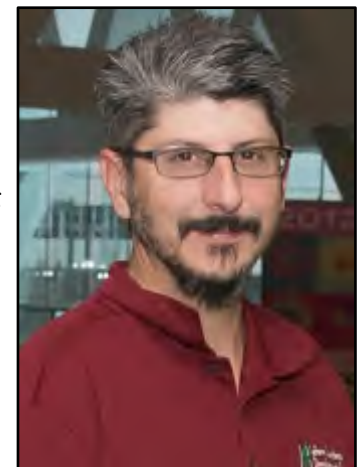
West Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association has named Lisa McDavid as its new Secretary, a position recently established to ensure compliance with state code requirements. This addition reflects the organization’s continued commitment to strong governance and operational integrity. Lisa owns Lisa’s Gardenscapes in Charleston



Lisa McDavid

The Association also extends its sincere gratitude to Biafore for his

remarkable 18 years of service on the Board of Directors. His leadership, including his tenure as President, has played a significant role in advancing WVNLA’s mission and supporting the green industry across the state. Patrick is Vice President of Biafore Landscape Development, LLC, in Morgantown.



Patrick Biafore

We appreciate the time and talent both Lisa and Pat have shared.

WVNLA Members Reach Out to High School Students

As the green industry enters its busiest season, workforce development remains one of its most pressing priorities. Attracting the next generation of professionals is essential to sustaining and growing the industry, and that work starts with education and outreach.

Despite the demands of spring, four of our members recently took time out of their schedules to connect with local high school students, sharing insights into the wide range of career opportunities available in the green industry. From hands-on skills to long-term career pathways, their efforts helped highlight the value and potential of this field for young people exploring their futures.

Michael Biafore, Biafore Landscape Development in Morgantown; Robert Gompers, Highland Landscaping and Highland Nurseries in Buckhannon; and Matt Ware, Terra Flora Landscaping in Elkins worked with Pierpont Community and Technical College to provide classroom and hands-on learning for students at Buckhannon Upshur High School. The three-day course covered safety, small equipment use, plant identification and design, and landscape installation. Under the trio's direction, the students headed outside, where they unloaded a truck, studied a landscape plan and installed an attractive landscape bed at the school's entrance.

The students each received certification upon passing an exam and completing the course.

Meanwhile, Betsy Raynes, owner of Riverside Sod Farm in Winfield, manned a booth at the Buffalo High School Career Fair, where she talked with students about green industry careers.

We commend and thank these members for their commitment to investing in the next generation and helping ensure a strong, skilled workforce for years to come.



Students dig into installation.



Michael Biafore (in red) and Matt Ware (right) lead the students.



Robert Gompers and students



Michael Biafore and student



Betsy Raynes welcomes students to the Green Industry Career booth.



Students received certificates for completing the course.

WVNLA NEWS

P. O. Box 20284

Charleston, WV 25362

Dates to Note

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Aug. 7 | WVNLA Board Meeting
Parkersburg |
| Aug. 12 | Pesticide Applicators
Education, Glade Springs, Daniels |
| Aug. 12 | Certified Professional
Horticulturist exam, 3:30 p.m.
Glade Springs, Daniels |
| Feb. 17 | 2027 Winter Symposium
Charleston |



Officers & Board of Directors

President:

Robert Gompers – bgompers@aol.com

Vice President:

Jason Testman –
testman@valleygardens.com

Secretary:

Lisa McDavid – lisasgardenscapes@yahoo.com

Treasurer:

Mark Springer – mark@lavalette.net

Past President:

Stephen Saunders – saunders801@aol.com

Board Members:

Michael Biafore – michael@biafore.com

Bud Cottrill – westvirginiabud@yahoo.com

Zach Crede – zach@credelawncare.com

David Hill – davidhill.threetrees@gmail.com

John Jett – drjohnjett@gmail.com

Betsy Raynes – betsyraynes@yahoo.com

Executive Director:

Julie Robinson – wvnlassoc@gmail.com