

Seeds

Department of Horticulture

Volume 18

2011

Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

Greetings all alumni and friends! As always, it has been a very busy year around Saunders Hall. Fall semester began with a department-wide self study in preparation for an overall review by the federal government to be held in late January. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), part of the USDA, periodically reviews all aspects of departments in colleges of agriculture. Our last review was in 2003, so it was our turn once again! The review is made by a team headed by a NIFA employee and comprises several professors from approximately equivalent departments across the U.S. The team spends several days meeting with faculty, staff, and students to look at all our programs. Our team leader was Dr. Mary Peet (National Program Leader for Organic Agriculture and Horticulture at NIFA), and team members included Dr. Robert Augé (Professor and Department Head, Department of Plant Science, University of Tennessee), Dr. Robert Geneve (Professor of Horticulture, University of Kentucky), Dr. Cecil Stushnoff (Professor of Horticulture, Colorado State University), and Dr. Ted Bilderback (Professor of Horticulture and Interim Arboretum Director, North Carolina State University). The review basically affirmed our recent efforts in teaching, research, and extension/outreach and provided helpful suggestions on how we might better focus some of our programs.

This past year saw the retirement of two faculty members. Dr. Alan McDaniel, favorite teacher and advisor to countless undergraduate students on the Blacksburg Campus, and Dr. Bonnie Appleton, longtime extension specialist and key to our non-thesis MS program at the Hampton Roads AREC in Virginia Beach retired. Dr. McDaniel has agreed to continue to teach his popular Floral Design class through 2012. We are fortunate

in that we are adding three faculty positions in 2011. We hosted nine interviews for these three positions this last year (eight fall semester). I am pleased to announce that Dr. Gregory Peck begins as Assistant Professor of Fruit Crops at the Alson H. Smith, Jr. AREC in April. Dr. Mark Williams begins as Assistant Professor of Rhizosphere Biology and Plant-Microbe Interaction at the Blacksburg campus in June, and Dr. Jim Owen will be joining us as Assistant Professor of Nursery Crops at the Hampton Roads AREC in August. Please see the separate articles on Drs. McDaniel, Appleton, Peck, Williams, and Owen in this edition of *SEEDS*.

Please help us spread the word about the world of Horticulture! We would like to market our undergraduate program by developing an online resource about career paths that our alumni have taken. To this end, we have developed an online survey that can be accessed at <http://www.hort.vt.edu/alumnisurvey.pdf>. This is a PDF file that can be either filled in and e-mailed back or put in the good ole mailbox. Please take a moment to fill this out. The directions to send it back are on the file. Also – are you getting our monthly e-newsletter? If not, please let me know if you would like to receive it (rharris@vt.edu) and I will add you to the e-mail list.

With kind regards,
Roger Harris
Department Head



Alumni Spotlight: Mike Hildebrand

Mike Hildebrand earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Virginia Tech in 1974. His horticulture concentration was Ornamental Horticulture and Landscape Design. However, his interest in horticulture was cultivated in advance of attending Virginia Tech. While in high school, and even during his



Mike Hildebrand and his wife Susie.

college years, he worked at DeHaven Nursery in his home town of Winchester, Virginia. After graduating from Virginia Tech, he worked for Lairds Nursery in Richmond as a landscape foreman; Mike quickly moved up to the landscape designer and salesman positions. In 1983 he founded James River Nurseries with his business partner Al Jones in Hanover County. Several years later, Mike co-founded James River Irrigation and James River Grounds Management. These are premier landscape-related companies that are highly regarded in the trade. Mike takes pride in the fact that these companies have employed and still employ many Virginia Tech Horticulture and Landscape Architecture graduates. Mike's other business ventures include Glen Allen Nurseries and James River Cellars. Mike's contributions to the landscape industry go well beyond his business; he is involved in industry organizations such as the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), and Agriculture in the Classroom.

On a personal note, Mike and his wife Susie have been married for 36 years; she's a graduate of the University of Virginia but their enduring love overcomes any intercollegiate rivalry. They have two sons who are both employed at James River Nurseries. Brian is a Radford University graduate with a Business degree and Dan is a Virginia Tech graduate who upheld his Dad's tradition and earned a B.S. in Horticulture in 2007. Mike's hobbies include coaching/attending sports activities; he has a special interest in Virginia Tech athletics and attends all the events that his schedule will allow.

When asked what advice he would give to horticulture students entering the horticultural job market, Mike notes "Horticulture students have many opportunities and challenges ahead. The green sustainable movement will be a catalyst for many job opportunities in our industry. Challenges do lie ahead with more government regulations and a changing economy. Continuation of education will be needed to face these challenges. Employers will need educated employees to face these new opportunities and challenges."

Mike is a true Hokie. He is an avid supporter of the Virginia Tech Horticulture Department and the Hahn Horticulture Garden. He and his wife are members of the Virginia Tech Capital Campaign and members of the Agricultural and Life Sciences Steering Committee. The Department of Horticulture is very proud of Mike's professional and personal achievements. His generous support of the Department of Horticulture and Virginia Tech are much appreciated.

Passing of Dr. Roncai Yuan

2010 marked a period of mourning for us as we said goodbye to our colleague, Dr. Roncai Yuan, who died last April after a long illness. Dr. Yuan was hired in April 2005 and served as Assistant Professor and Extension Horticulturist at the Alson H. Smith, Jr. AREC in Winchester. His research and extension programs focused on regulation of apple thinning and pre-harvest fruit drop within the broader area of tree fruit horticulture. He is survived by his wife, Ying Shen Yuan, and his young sons William and John. Dr. Yuan had already established himself internationally as a prominent scientist, and he was an excellent mentor of graduate students and a very collegial member of our faculty. He is fondly remembered and very much missed.

Retirement: Dr. Bonnie Appleton

Congratulations to Dr. Bonnie Appleton on her retirement last June after a long and fruitful service to Virginia Tech and Virginia's green industry. She positively impacted so many people, from horticulture students of all ages to colleagues, peers and green industry professionals. Bonnie's enthusiasm, creativity, and love of horticulture were obvious. She traveled extensively, enjoyed teaching, and never hesitated to share information in whatever format was appropriate - workshops, classes, presentations, scientific journals, trade and popular press articles, interviews, expert testimony, extension publications, and books. Bonnie was instrumental in the development of our unique off-campus MS program, and her biggest legacy is surely the very positive impact that she had on so many graduate students. Since the first graduation class in 1995, more than 60 students have gotten their diplomas through this program, most under the direct tutelage of Dr. Appleton. We will miss her, but we wish her well on that long list of post-retirement projects.



News from the Hahn Horticulture Garden

Dr. Holly Scoggins, Associate Professor and Garden Director

The Mike and Susie Hildebrand Landscape Internship at the Hahn Horticulture Garden

Mike Hildebrand (HORT '74) and his wife Susie have been great fans and supporters of the Hahn Garden and the Horticulture Department for the past decade. Their latest efforts come in the form of student internship funding. A generous annual pledge from the Hildebrand's has allowed us to offer a new full-time garden internship to students interested in the area of public horticulture. As Mike owns James River Nursery, Inc., a successful design/build firm and rewholesale nursery in Ashland, we've selected the landscape maintenance and construction aspect for the focus of this internship. Jacob Chance, a Horticulture senior from Woodstock, VA, has been selected for this internship.

Hahn Garden Hosts Plant Explorer and Nurseryman Dan Hinkley

Part of the Hahn Garden's educational mission is to bring top-notch speakers to our campus and community. An audience of 90+ turned out to hear Dan Hinkley on February 24. Dan is a nationally known and award-winning plant explorer, author, and all-around great guy. Dan's beautiful and fascinating multimedia presentation covered his days founding Heronswood garden and nursery near Seattle, his subsequent move to his new garden "Windcliff," and a plant-lust-inducing travelogue of his botanizing trips around the world.

2011 Garden Gala: "Lucky Seven"

The 7th annual Garden Gala held on **Saturday, June 11** was a huge success! This year's gala featured a casino theme, with plenty of blackjack tables and other games (all with "play" money, of course). We also had fantastic food, drinks, and décor. Fabulous plants, garden art, and other items were available for bidding in the silent auction. And as the number of Hort alumni in attendance has increased each year – it's practically become a reunion!

For more information on future Garden Gala sponsorships, tickets, educational programs, or anything else regarding the garden, visit our website www.hort.vt.edu/edu. Please don't hesitate to give us a call at (540) 231-5970 or send an email to perennials@vt.edu. You can also "like" us on Facebook for the latest in events, seasonal photos, and more! Just search "Hahn Horticulture Garden."

Retirement: Alan McDaniel

Alan McDaniel, who retired in July 2010, has been totally, wholly, and completely committed to the academic, professional, and personal advancement of students during his 35 year tenure at Virginia Tech. He served as the Horticulture Department's Coordinating Counselor for most of those years and was the primary resource person in the area of teacher certification through the Agriculture Education minor for students pursuing preparation in technical horticulture. Among his greatest contributions to the department were those involved in broad based student advising. Although student advising was shared by multiple faculty members in the department, Alan carried the bulk of the load every semester in terms of student numbers and was the go-to guy whenever a difficult question arose or a circumstance occurred that required resolution up the College food chain. His knowledge of College and University policies and procedures relating to academics was unmatched. In recognition of his superb efforts to students in this regard, he received the Excellence in Career Advising Award. Alan taught several courses over the years, including Vegetable Production, Controlled Plant Environment, and Fundamentals of Horticulture. However, his greatest impact in the department's instructional program was his 'Floral Design' course, which he taught for over 20 years in both fall and spring semesters each year requiring him to oversee four laboratory sessions per week, two of which were late evening classes. His laboratories served as a training ground for scores of student assistants, many of whom considered him a mentor. Attendance every semester was "standing room only." Alan's participation in Department, College, and University governance was second to none compared to his peers within the department. Noteworthy among an extensive list were Chair of the Curriculum Committee, Faculty Senate Representative, and Advisor to the Honor System Review Board. One of his greatest passions was his national involvement in Future Farmers of America (FFA) governance and administering FFA activities on campus each summer. When hundreds of students in their blue jackets were parading around campus, everyone knew that Alan was busily at work helping to coordinate their many events. His devotion to FFA was recognized in receipt of the FFA Outstanding Service Award and the FFA Degree of Honorary American Farmer Award. Alan has also been supportive of ASHS during his entire career and was a winner of the ASHS – Southern Region Extension Publication Award. Though officially retired, Alan remains active professionally by continuing to teach the Floral Design course, but is finding more personal time to visit with and enjoy the company of his two young grandchildren.



Alumni News

2000 – 2010

Scott Ellis ('10) is living in Bristol, VA with his wife Meg. He is working as a foreman for Englewood Lawn & Landscape in Kingsport, TN managing a crew and various landscape projects.

James Smithson ('06) is the Manager of the Estimating and Design department at E-Landscape Specialty Solutions, LLC. They specialize in commercial landscape construction services in the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area (including Baltimore, all of Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Delaware). One notable achievement from last year was their participation in the ABC show "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," where they designed and installed the landscaping for the home built and featured on the show. The home was for the Boys Hope Girls Hope organization in Baltimore, MD.

JSmithson@e-landscapellc.com

www.e-landscapellc.com

Susan and Howard Anderson ('00) Susan's company East Branch Ginger provides high quality, disease-free, certified organic ginger seed pieces. East Branch Ginger and Puna Organics provide the best ginger seed pieces and cultural support you need to grow and market your Baby Ginger. Howard works for Nunhem's as their pickling cucumber seed sales rep for North America and Canada. They are relocating to NC in May, nearer to Mt. Olive. They have two children; Isabel is 5 and Walter is 3 years old. They are looking forward to the move and hope to come back to visit Tech often in the coming years.

www.eastbranchginger.com

eastbranchginger@gmail.com

1990 – 1999

Jenifer G. Horn ('96) After 11 years of professional practice, Jennifer started her business, Jennifer Horn Landscape Architecture, a little over a year ago. It's going well and she has some exciting projects scheduled to begin in the late spring and summer. There's a growing likelihood she'll be spending some more time in Hawaii this year and she's had meetings with architects about residences in Mays Landing, NJ; Georgetown, DC; East Hampton, NY; Bethesda, MD, and Loudoun County, VA. JHLA is also officially becoming an LLC and her hits on planted cloud are increasing steadily. An article she wrote about residential landscape design will be published by the American Society of Landscape Architects newsletter this spring and she spoke at the Chevy Chase Garden Club this February. She has also

become a member of the US Green Building Council and will pursue LEEDS AP certification within the year. This past winter she taught horticulture and design courses at the USDA Graduate School in DC and she continues to teach her plant identification courses for Columbia University.

jenniferghorn.com

plantedcloud.com

1980 – 1989

David Hale Horton ('85) is the owner/president of Cedar Oaks Landscape, which he has operated since 1987. He is basically a professional gardener most of the year. He has had a successful Christmas wreath business from November through December for the last 20 years. He has developed a method to preserve fresh greens used in the wreaths to make a superior product equaled by none in the industry, at least in his opinion. He lives in Glen Allen, VA.

DavidHHorton@cs.com

David Dunaway ('82) is employed with the Virginia State University Cooperative Extension Service as a Horticulture Technician/Laboratory and Research Specialist at the Randolph Farm. It has always been his dream to work with Extension in a horticulture capacity. His last position was at James River Nurseries with Mike Hildebrand.

Lloyd Michael Vess ('81) is the senior pastor of Arlington Forest United Method Church in Arlington, VA. He has finished a term in Japan working as a rural community builder and agricultural missionary. Hobbies include ikebana and flying. He is interested in working for an NGO dealing with hunger issues. Lloyd lives in Arlington, VA.

lmikevess@yahoo.com

1970 – 1979

Will Rhodes ('79) is working in Afghanistan for his second year. His wife is in another province in Afghanistan. They both work for the USDA. One of the most successful programs has been Ag in the Classroom. This year he plans to reach 4000 students. His youngest son will be coming over with the US Marines later this year.

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New Hires

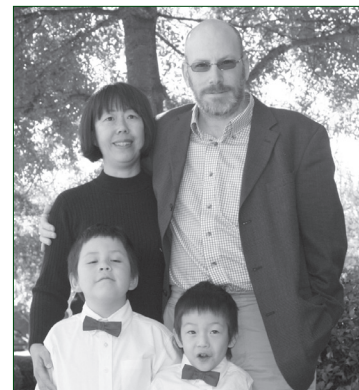
Jim Owen

Jim Owen will be joining the Virginia Tech faculty at the Hampton Roads Research Station, Virginia Beach in August. Jim and his wife Ellen have a 5-year old son Griffin and a 3-year old daughter Sylvia. Jim was born and raised in Northern Kentucky, the son of cemetery workers who instilled their love for horticulture at a young age. Jim received his B.S. in Plant and Soil Science at the University of Kentucky and an M.S. in Environmental Science at the University of Rhode Island. He received his Ph.D. at North Carolina State University with a major in Horticultural Science and minor in Soil Science while investigating clay amended soilless substrates to increase water and nutrient efficiency in containerized crop production. After his doctorate Jim became the nursery crops production researcher and Extension specialist at Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center where he has had the opportunity to continue work on soilless substrates, crop and soil mineral nutrition, and irrigation management. Additionally, Jim has become involved in automation and technology for the nursery industry. Jim looks forward to beginning his research and Extension program at Virginia Tech while completing ongoing research and simultaneously conducting a needs assessment for Virginia growers. The dominant focus of Jim's research and Extension program in Virginia will be water and nutrient management efficiency in nurseries. The overarching goal of the program is to effectively increase production and resource efficiencies while minimizing environmental impact. Welcome Jim!



Mark Williams

Mark Williams will join our Blacksburg campus faculty as Assistant Professor of Rhizosphere Biology and Plant-Microbe Interactions in June. Mark grew up in Arkansas and received his B.S. in Environmental Science from Oregon State University in 1995. His M.S. and Ph.D. were in soil microbiology from Kansas State University. Since obtaining his Ph.D. in 2001, Mark served as a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Oregon State University and as Assistant Research Scientist at the University of Georgia. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Plant and Soil Sciences Department at Mississippi State University. Mark brings a very exciting expertise that has been sorely missing in our college. His office and lab will be in Latham Hall.



Mark Williams with his wife Kang Xia and sons Béla and Kyler

When asked, "Who is Mark Williams" he responded: "I am a microbial ecologist with special interests in the ecology of microbial communities in the rhizosphere and plant-microbial interactions. My wife, Kang Xia, a soil and environmental chemist will be joining the VT family in the Department of Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences. We have two super wonderful boys: Béla (pronounced: Bayla) and Kyler, 6 and 3, respectively. We are very excited about our move to beautiful Blacksburg/SW Virginia and I especially look forward to the great number of outdoor activities to explore in the area as our boys grow. One of my favorite current extracurricular activities is the coaching-"herding" of my son's U6 Soccer team." Please join us in welcoming Mark and his family!

Gregory Peck

Gregory Peck will join our faculty at the Alson H. Smith, J. Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Winchester this April as Assistant Professor of Fruit Crops. Greg has more than 15 years of professional experience working with specialty crops in California, Washington, and New York. Following his bachelor's work in Comparative Religion at the University of Vermont in 1994, Greg earned a Certificate in Ecological Horticulture at



UC Santa Cruz in 1996, a Master's degree in Horticulture at Washington State University in 2004, and a Doctoral degree in Horticulture at Cornell University in 2009. Greg's research uses systems-based approaches to study orchard agroecology. He also has considerable hands-on horticultural experience from working on various farms and nurseries, and from owning and operating a landscape design business in California. Currently, Greg is completing his term as Interim Director of the Cornell Nutrient Analysis Laboratory before he relocates to Winchester with his wife, Kathi, and their son, Ethan. They are excited to explore and make their home in the Northern Shenandoah Valley. Please join us in welcoming Greg and his family!

Seeds

Department of Horticulture

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Alumni Information Form

The Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture would like to have current information on your activities and accomplishments. Please complete this form to let us know where you are and what you're doing.

Name: _____ Year and Degree: _____

Home Address: _____

Employer: _____ Current Job Title: _____

Work Address: _____ E-mail Address: _____

News about Yourself (attach additional pages as needed): _____

