

Fall 2008, Volume 16

Seeds

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Fred Duis, Sr.

This year's alumni spotlight is on Mr. Fred Duis, Sr., President, Duis Nursery, Inc., Bedford, Virginia. Fred grew up on the nursery operated by his father, William H. Duis, who was formerly a professor of Horticulture at West Virginia University and the Dean of Agriculture at Hampton Institute from 1940-1946, after which he founded the nursery. Fred's wife of 39 years, Charlotte P. Duis, retired from teaching high school math after 31 years, and presently is secretary and bookkeeper for Duis Nursery. Charlotte now applies a skill set



Fred Duis receives Virginia Nurseryman of the Year Award for 2007 from Doug Hensel, previous recipient.

acquired by teaching high school to the nursery's business model, and, as a result, Fred says, "Profits are up. Her attention to detail is legendary. She reviews our invoices and other documents with red pen in hand and, for the first time in my career, I have to justify every expenditure." So, at age 61, I am saying to myself, "Oh, this is how a business is supposed to be run."

Fred graduated from Liberty High School, Bedford, Virginia (1965) and from Virginia Tech with a BS degree in Horticulture (1969). He practiced landscape design in the Bedford/Lynchburg area, 1969-1981, and assumed operation of Duis Nursery upon his father's death in 1981. Fred and Charlotte have two children, Frederick M., and Sarah D., and four grandchildren.

Duis Nursery is a small wholesale container growing operation that serves landscapers and garden centers in central and western Virginia and southern West Virginia. They take pride in an inventory that ranges from trees and shrubs to perennials and annuals. Their market niche is to provide a wide-ranging palette of plant materials at competitive prices, in a convenient location, on every business

(see **DUIS** on back)

Greetings from the Department of Horticulture

Greetings all alumni and friends! I hope that you all had a bountiful summer and that you are enjoying this beautiful fall. Jerzy Nowak, former Head of our department, has moved on to be the Director of the new Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention (CPSVP). We wish Dr. Nowak all the best in this exciting new endeavor. He is a dear friend to our department, and we look forward to collaborating with him in his new mission. With Dr. Nowak's departure, Dean Sharron Quisenberry appointed me as Interim Department Head as of July 1 of this year. I feel truly honored to be named to this position. I have just completed my 15th year as a faculty member in the department and look forward to serving in my new position. During the past 15 years, I have taught *Plant Propagation, Landscape Establishment and Maintenance, Nursery Crops, Urban Horticulture, Internship Seminar, and Landscape Practicum* classes. Before graduate school (M.S. at University of Florida and Ph.D. at Cornell University), I spent two years at Campbell's Nursery in Franklin, Virginia, and 10 years with Jacksonville Landscape Co. in Jacksonville, Florida.

Our academic year is in full swing, and Saunders Hall is busy with all of the coming and goings of 115 energized undergraduate Horticulture students. We began the semester with two separate *Landscape Practicum* classes. These hands-on classes are held the

(see **GREETINGS** on back)

Early History of Horticulture at Virginia Tech

Horticulture is one of the oldest departments at Virginia Tech, with the first floriculture class offered in 1872, the year W. Addison Caldwell became Virginia Tech's first student. In 1892 Dr. J.M. McBryde was elected President of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and the Experiment Station (now Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, fondly known as Virginia Tech). During President McBryde's tenure, the courses of study at the college were completely reorganized and the reputation of the college solidified, giving him the name of "the Father of V.P.I." Dr. W. B. Alwood, noted pomologist and enologist was elected to be the first chair of the department of Horticulture, Mycology, and Entomology. Mycology and Entomology formed their own department in 1902, and Harvey L. Price became the first Head of the new Department of Horticulture. He later became the Dean of Agriculture and was the person for whom Price Hall is named.

The first Bachelor of Science degrees at the university were awarded in 1892 to five students, one of whom was a horticulture major (the others were in chemistry, civil engineering, and mechanical engineering). Women students were rare in the early years, with the first class of women graduating in 1925. One of these early graduates, Doris Shannon of Blacksburg, was perhaps the first woman horticulture student, graduating in 1930.



Two Horticulture Faculty Go on Seed Collecting Trip to China

Rumen Conev and Alex Niemiera embarked on a seed collecting trip to China in September 2008. The goal of their 11-day trip was to collect ornamental plant species that have potential as landscape plants for Virginia. The trip was funded in part by the

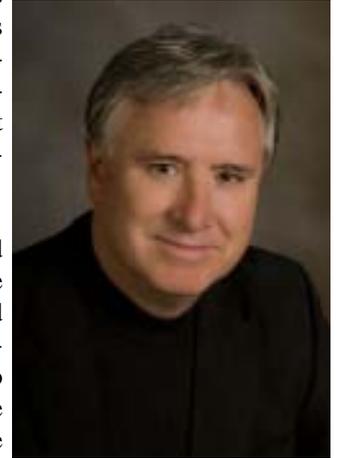


Virginia Agricultural Council and by the Department of Horticulture. They collected seeds from the mountains of Yunnan Province in Southwest China which is one of the richest areas of plant diversity in the world. Yunnan Province holds 52 percent of China's 30,000 plant species. They also collected seed at the Beijing Botanical Garden.

Once necessary documentation and importation details are completed, they will germinate seeds at Virginia Tech and then evaluate the landscape performance of these plants at five plant evaluation sites throughout Virginia. These sites are part of the Beautiful Gardens™ Plant Introduction Program; Rumen Conev serves as the director of the program. Alex Niemiera teaches the *Woody Landscape Plant* classes and other courses in the Horticulture Department and will be teaching a new course the 2009 spring semester entitled *Globalization and Horticulture*. This was Alex's fifth trip to China and Rumen's first.

McDuffie Receives Virginia Tech's W.E. Wine Award for Excellence in Teaching

Robert F. McDuffie, associate professor of horticulture, received the 2008 University W.E. Wine Award for Teaching Excellence. The Wine Awards were established in 1957 by the Alumni Association in memory of William E. Wine (class of 1904), former rector of the Board of Visitors and Alumni Association president. McDuffie was recognized for his superior teaching skills, his mentoring of undergraduate students, and his leadership in producing new programs that benefit students and broaden their education.



Several years ago he saw a need for qualified individuals in the growing landscape industry and developed an option in landscaping contracting. According to Jerzy Nowak, former head of the Department, the program is a huge success with the majority of the undergraduate horticulture students enrolled in it. "The program is recognized as one of the premier programs in the country," he said.

In addition to his numerous domestic field trips that broaden students' perspective of horticulture, in 1998 Robert organized the first two-week study abroad trip to England. The program has grown over the past decade to allow alumni, landscape professionals, and others to join students in studying gardens around the world. More than 500 individuals have participated in these study tours to 15 countries on four continents. McDuffie has just completed thirty years of service to the University.

Hort Teaching Greenhouses Renovated

The Quonsut greenhouses located at the Washington Street Greenhouse Facility are getting a much needed facelift this year. For over 30 years these greenhouses have served as teaching laboratories, for such classes as *Indoor Plants*, *Plant Propagation*, and *Floriculture Crops* to name a few. These old structures are an integral part of the Horticulture experience at Virginia Tech, and if you're a Horticulture alumnus, you may have had a class in them at some point.

Recently Jacob A. Lutz III, who served as a Rector on the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, pledged a donation to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences that will enable a majority of these greenhouses to be updated this year with new polycarbonate covering, fans, louvers, and control systems. Renovations to these greenhouses will be completed by the end of Spring Semester 2009, and at that time they will be named to honor Dr. Jacob Lutz, a retired CALS faculty member.

Alumni News

2000-2008

George M. Dickert BS '03 is an Agriculture Natural Resources Agent at Clemson University. He was a field representative for Royalty Administration International for two years prior to joining the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service. He lives in Spartanburg, S.C. (gdicker@clemson.edu)

Sheri Musselwhite Chisholm MS '02 is co-owner of Flora Landscape, LLC, a design-build-maintain landscape company in Wilmington, N.C. Her husband Brock works with them heading up the Maintenance Division. They have a 16 month old daughter, Naomi Fields, and live in Wilmington, N.C. (FloraLandscapes@bellsouth.net)

Kathryn J. D'Angelo BS '00 is the Farm Manager at Layman's Wholesale Nurseries. She just bought a new home in North Augusta, S.C.

1990-1999

Aaron Williams BS '98 is President/Owner of Williams Landscape & Design. He recently assisted the Girl Scout Cadette Troop 1409 with refurbishing the Children's House Garden at the Williamsburg Montessori School. He lives in Williamsburg, Va.

Kelley Weppner Jain BS '96 is Development Coordinator at The Geneva School. She and her husband Ravi live in Orlando, Fla.

Michelle Gervais BS '95 is an Associate Editor with *Fine Gardening Magazine*. She and her husband Robert (VT '94) have a daughter, born in March 2006, and they live in New Milford, Conn.

Dwayne R. D'Ardenne BS '93 has been the Landscape Coordinator for the City of Roanoke since October 2000. He became an Adjunct Faculty at Virginia Western Community College in January 2007. He spoke for Dr. Harris at the fall 2007 Green Industry Forum. He and his wife Ellen and their son Dawson Christopher, who was born July 3, 2007, live in Roanoke, Va.

Anthony L. Glunt BS '92 owns A. L. Glunt Landscape Designs, Inc. He has been married to his wife Heather for 15 years, and they have one child, Corbin, 10 years old. They live in Chesterfield, Va.

1970-1979

Donna Baker Meeks MS '77 is Superintendent of Grounds at Sweet Briar College. The *Princeton Review* ranked Sweet Briar College as #1 in "Beautiful Campus" category, a real honor for their grounds crew. She and her husband Thomas '73 live in Amherst, Va. (dmeeks@sbc.edu)

1960-1969

Mac Perry BS '69 is President of Mac Perry's Lawn-Guard, Inc. He recently celebrated 25 years in the lawn and ornamental pest control business. Earlier he was County Horticulture Agent in St. Petersburg, Fla. and has written four books on horticulture. He and his wife Linda Faye live in St. Petersburg, Fla. (macperry@tampabay.rr.com)

**Alumni: We would love to hear from you. Please complete the Information Form below.
We'll publish your information in next year's issue.**

DEPARTMENT OF HORTICULTURE ALUMNI INFORMATION FORM

The Virginia Tech Department of Horticulture wishes 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 _____ Degree _____ Year _____
(Last) (First) (M.I.) (Maiden)

Address _____

Position and employer _____

Spouse's Name _____

News of interest _____

E-mail address: _____ ok to publish? _____

Return to: Joyce Shelton, Dept. of Horticulture (0327), Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061

The Department's Role in the Development of the Virginia Wine Industry

The cultivation of grapes in Virginia can be traced to colonial efforts at Jamestown and later to Thomas Jefferson's efforts at Monticello. Virginia was a major wine producer towards the end of the 19th century, but Prohibition and other factors led to subsequent declines. Virginia's contemporary wine industry emerged during the late 70's when Virginia had six farm wineries and less than 700 acres of commercial wine grapes. Today there are more than 130 wineries and close to 3,000 acres of grapes. The challenges to grape and wine production in Virginia are abundant and complex, but not insurmountable. While our humid climate is conducive to fungal diseases, we also enjoy some climatic good fortune.



Virginia avoids much of the damaging winter cold temperatures that affect more northerly states, and yet is far enough north to avoid much of the extreme heat of the South. Viticultural (from *Vitis*, the genus of grape) research and extension efforts, headed by Dr. Tony Wolf, Department of Horticulture, and located at the Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Winchester, have spanned a range of applied problems and practical solutions which have facilitated the growth of the industry. Variety evaluations established in the late 80's revealed the superior performance and wine potential of some cultivars that are now commonly grown. Grapevine canopy management studies have illustrated the benefits of using advanced vine training systems, selective defoliation from around fruit clusters, and other measures to promote grape and wine quality. The full economic impact of Virginia's wine and grape industry was calculated at \$361.8 million in 2005, a figure that reflects the spin-off impacts to tourism, employment, as well as direct and distributed wine sales. Technical viticulture resources can be found at Dr. Wolf's website: <http://faculty.vaes.vt.edu/vitis>

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Garden Gala 2008 - Blue Ridge Blooms

The Hahn Horticulture Garden was once again the site of a very successful garden gala - this year's theme was "Blue Ridge Blooms" and a celebration of the new meadow garden. The evening featured fabulous food, drink, silent and live auctions, and Appalachian music by the Celtibillies. More than 200 people attended. The gala raised more than \$15,000 for the garden's operation fund. The gala helps fund garden internships, student worker wages, maintenance equipment, and other garden projects. Plan now to attend the next Garden Gala - June 13, 2009! For more information on gala sponsorships or other garden projects, please contact Dr. Scoggins at perennials@vt.edu or call 540-231-5783.



Mark & Merideth Maslow (left) and Chris & Liz Mays came all the way from Lynchburg to attend the gala! Mark and Chris are

Horticulture alumni and their business, Southern Landscapes, Inc., was one of many generous gala sponsors (photo courtesy of Allison Byrd).



Alumnus Jim Monroe (center) of Greenbrier Nurseries chats with Robert Wright (left) and Alex Niemiera (right) of the Horticulture Department at the 2008 Garden Gala. (photo courtesy of Allison Byrd)



Susie Hildebrand with the EZ-Go Workhorse donated to the Hahn Horticulture Garden by her and her husband, Mike Hildebrand, of James River Nurseries, Ashland, Virginia. Garden staff affectionately named the cart "Susie" in her honor and can't imagine life without this wonderful gift!

Meadow Garden Dedication - Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech

The Hahn Meadow Garden was dedicated the evening of the Garden Gala - June 14, 2008 - as the gala crowd gathered under the big tent to pay tribute to Peggy Lee Hahn. The Hahn's generous



Peggy and Marshall Hahn with Holly Scoggins at the dedication of the Hahn Meadow Garden, June 14, 2008 (photo courtesy of Matt Gentry)

gift funded the design and construction of the entire meadow garden area - nearly an acre. It is the first garden feature with frontage on Duck Pond Drive - welcoming all who come on to campus via that route. Meadow Garden features include the Hokie Stone™ amphitheater and Peggy's Meadow, planted with native grasses, shrubs, trees, and perennials.

A paved path with gentle grades provides circulation around and throughout the meadow and is our first all-weather, accessible pathway within the HHG. The meadow design was by Nelson Byrd Woltz of Charlottesville. More than 90 percent of the plants were donated by Virginia nurseries, including Saunders Brothers, Inc., of Piney River; Bennett's Creek Nursery of Suffolk; Watkins Nurseries of Powhatan; and Waynesboro Nurseries. As years pass, this garden will become even more beautiful as the meadow plants grow and intermingle and the buffalo grass thrives. Our thanks to the Hahns for helping to create such a wonderful and unusual garden feature!

New Faculty

Dr. Susan D. Day

We welcomed Dr. Susan D. Day to our faculty this September as a new Assistant Professor with a joint appointment in the Department of Forestry. She will be teaching classes in *Urban Horticulture* and *Landscape Establishment & Maintenance*.

Dr. Day says she is really looking forward to teaching in the Horticulture Department and working with students on projects. According to Dr. Day, "It's hard not to be excited about all the new



opportunities for bringing plants into our lives so they are both functional and beautiful. We know more than ever about the different environmental and ecological benefits plants provide and have many more ways to incorporate horticultural practices and creativity into landscapes, even purely urban landscapes."

Dr. Day and Sarah Dickinson, research associate in sustainable landscapes (HORT '07, M.S.), are contributors to the recent report issued by the Sustainable Sites Initiative, a partnership of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and the United States Botanic Garden working in conjunction with a diverse group of stakeholder organizations to create a voluntary rating system for sustainable landscapes, akin to the LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System™.

Additional research areas include urban forestry, urban soils, and stormwater management. The work presents research developing a new technique for stormwater management beneath pavement using *structural soils*, specially engineered soil mixes that are both porous and load bearing.

In the past, she has taught *Urban Forestry & Arboriculture* and *Urban Forestry Management and Policy* in the Forestry department and been a frequent research collaborator with Horticulture faculty at the Urban Horticulture Center. She has a Ph.D. in Urban Forestry from Virginia Tech, an M.S. in Urban Horticulture from Cornell University, and a B.A. from Yale University. Dr. Day will be housed in the Forestry Department in Cheatham Hall and can be reached at sdd@vt.edu.

Deceased

Dr. C. Leslie McCombs, 87, died May 5, 2008 in Baltimore, Md. Dr. McCombs served the Department of Horticulture from 1971 to 1986 as Head of the Department.

Dr. George E. Mattus, 89, died May 16, 2008 in New Brunswick, N.J. Dr. Mattus, as a research scientist in the Department of Horticulture from 1949 to 1984, helped develop the use of controlled atmospheric storage of apples.

Nowak Named Director of Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention

Dr. Jerzy Nowak, head of the Department of Horticulture since August 2000 became the founding director of the new Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention at Virginia Tech effective



July 1, 2008. The center is a transdisciplinary undertaking intended to build on the cultural, academic, and security initiatives of the university's community that evolved from the tragedy of April 16, 2007. Before coming to Blacksburg, Dr. Nowak had lived, taught, and conducted research in Poland, West Germany, Nigeria, and Canada. As department head he has been adept at forming successful transdisciplinary teams. He co-founded the Institute for Sustainable and Renewable Resources in 2003, and has been a key player with the economic diversification program headed by the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research in Danville, Va. He most recently facilitated a multidisciplinary team of researchers and entrepreneurs to create a small-scale energy production system. We appreciate Dr. Nowak's service to the students, faculty, and staff of the Department, as well as to the horticulture industries of the state, and wish him well in his new appointment.

Connie Wallace

After graciously serving the Department as Executive Secretary for 28 years, Ms. Connie Wallace has taken a new position this



past August at Virginia Tech's new Center for Peace Studies and Violence Prevention (see above). While in Horticulture, she worked with four different department heads: Les McCombs, Tom Fretz, Robert Wright, and Jerzy Nowak. Connie made the department a better place due to her gracious and kind nature

and her ability to make everyone feel special. You never heard Connie say an unkind word about anyone. We certainly wish Connie the best and thank her for her many years of service to the Department.

DUIS (from front)

day of the year. Many of our alumni may recall field trip stops at Duis' Nursery where Fred offered his unique perspective on challenges facing a small but profitable nursery operation.

Fred is Co-founder, Past President, and current Board Member of the Wharton Memorial Foundation created for the purpose of promoting the cultural arts in Bedford in two ways: 1) through the establishment of a significant public garden that would envelop the newly renovated Public Library and three historic structures built either by or through the efforts of the Wharton family, and 2) through the restoration and the subsequent public use of the buildings themselves. Through Fred's efforts of fund raising and hard work, the garden and building restoration are now a reality, preserving a part of Bedford's rich history and offering a delightful garden setting for public use. One of the buildings, The Bower Center for the Arts, is now being operated as a music and arts education and performance center by the foundation.

Fred has also served the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association in a number of capacities, and in recognition of this service, the VNLA recognized Fred in January of this year as "Virginia Nurseryman of the Year" for 2007. He led the efforts of the VNLA Research Committee to introduce new landscape plants into the industry under the registered trademark of Beautiful Gardens®. Beginning in the spring of 2009, the first group of plants, all of which are considered excellent for Virginia's climatic regions, while being somewhat underutilized, will be promoted. Over time, the program will be introducing new and exciting plants that will come from varied sources: backyard hybridizers, chance mutations, native collections, and plant safaris to the ends of the earth. Five test sites have been established in Virginia to evaluate plants before introduction by the program.

GREETINGS (from front)

week before regular classes begin. One class focused on the emerging phenomenon of Green Roofs and culminated with the planting of part of the roof over Agnew Hall. Four students and two faculty members from Nova Scotia Agriculture College participated along with our VT students. The other class, *Garden Center Management*, featured participation by industry personnel as well as VT students. Our "Green Industry Extravaganza," consisting of the Fall Focus career fair and the industry-sponsored dinner the night before, was a resounding success. All reports are that the career fair was very well attended, and the representatives of 15 companies and 90 students enjoyed a great dinner at the German Club. Besides Horticulture, students from Landscape Architecture, Urban Forestry, Turfgrass, and Agricultural Technology programs participated. Our research programs are gaining momentum, especially in the fundamental side of plant science. We currently have 15 PhD and 6 MS graduate students in Blacksburg and 7 MS graduate students at the Hampton Roads AREC. Our faculty participated in a day-long retreat in September in which we concentrated on how to best embrace the future. In the near future we will be looking at new curriculum options and ways to better serve our industry.

As you all know, the economy is in a down cycle, and we are facing some tough budget cuts. We have five faculty positions that are currently open and frozen indefinitely. Even with these open positions, we still have 15 tenure track faculty in Blacksburg and four at our Agriculture Research and Extension Centers (AREC's). Although the economy is uncertain and we are holding our breath until we hear more on how the state budget cuts will affect us, I am constantly amazed at the confidence and positive attitude expressed by everyone involved in Horticulture. We are indeed in a great field!

Roger Harris
(rharris@vt.edu)

Seeds

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