

RESEARCHING SUCCESS

MADDY OLBERG'S HARD WORK AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY AND INTERNSHIP WITH BALL HORTICULTURAL CO. CAME TOGETHER FLAWLESSLY TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A FUTURE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH.

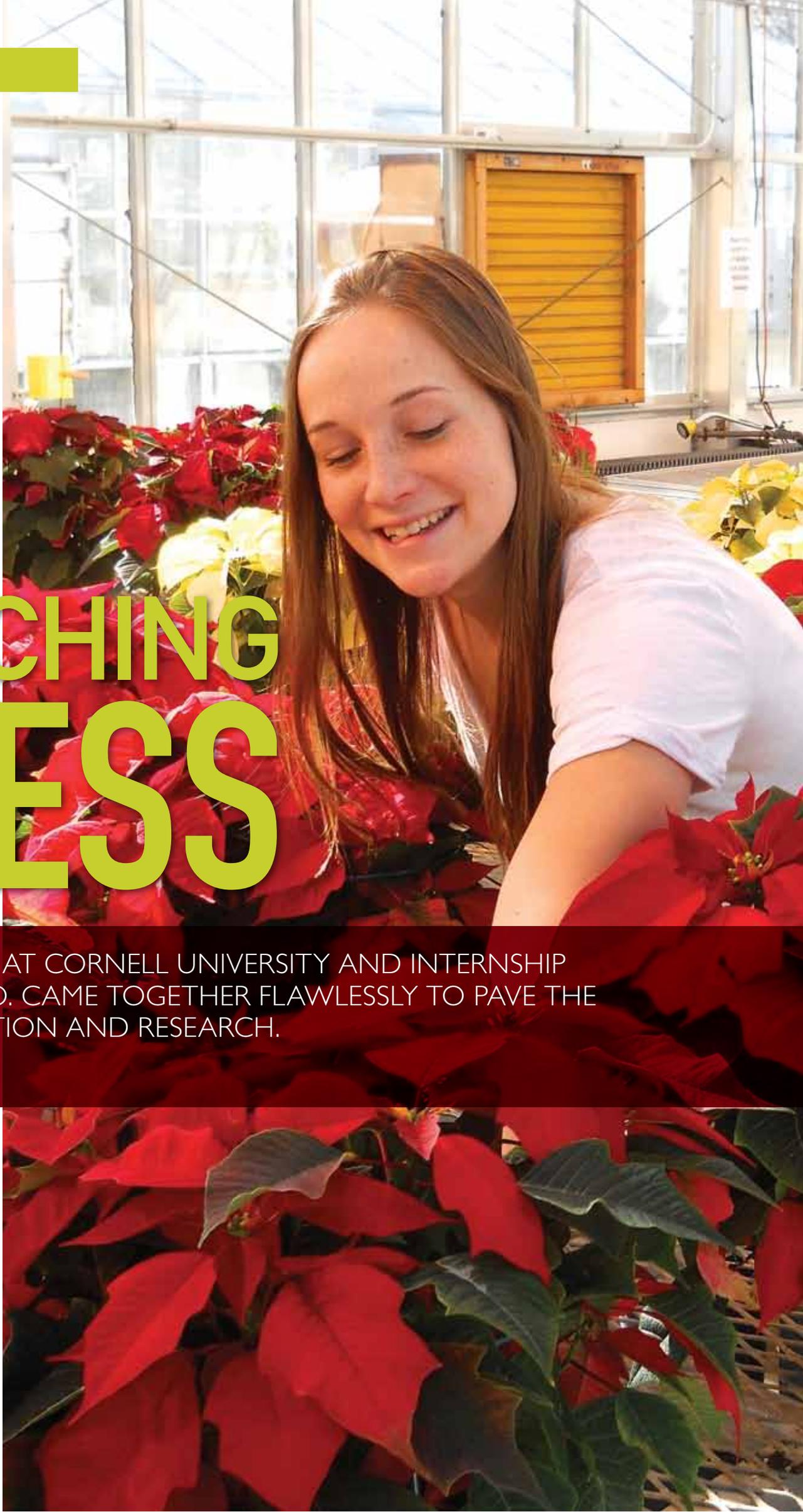
By Abby Kleckler

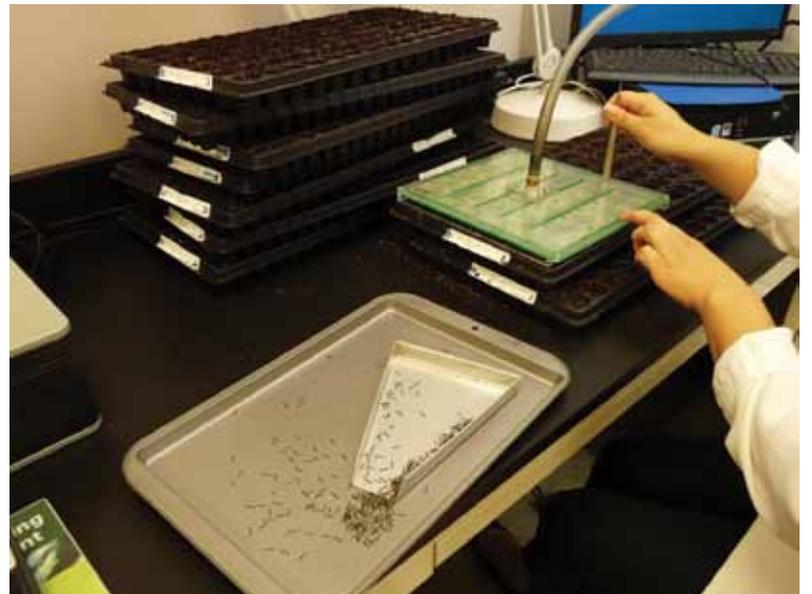
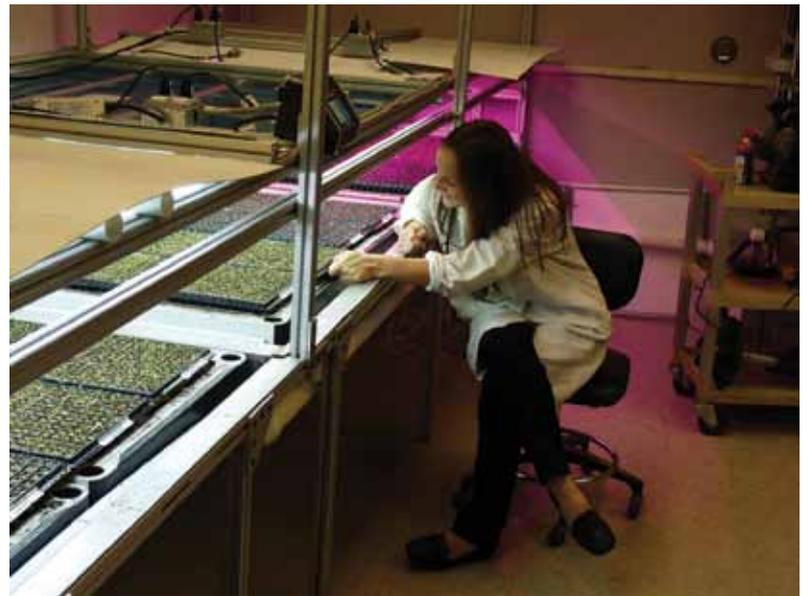
Madeline “Maddy” Olberg, the 2014 GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year, had a plan the first time she stepped foot on the Cornell University campus in Ithaca, N.Y., for her freshman year.

She had mapped out all the classes she hoped to take during her four years to earn a Bachelor of Science in plant sciences, with an emphasis on horticulture.

“It was kind of the opposite of what I normally see,” says Neil Mattson, Maddy’s academic advisor, associate professor and floriculture extension specialist at Cornell. “Maddy’s plan showed me how organized she is and also how take-charge and enthusiastic she is about her career.”

Three-and-a-half years later and just a few months from graduation in May 2014, Maddy has stuck to her plan, taking almost all the classes on her list. The





During the summer of 2013, Maddy Olberg worked as a seed technology research intern at Ball Horticultural Co.'s Premier Seed Lab in West Chicago, Ill.

one thing Maddy could not have anticipated in her four-year plan, however, was the impact one internship would have on her career path.

Maddy accepted a position as the seed technology research intern with Ball Horticultural Co.'s Premier Seed Lab during the summer of 2013, where she performed light evaluations for seedling development.

"Being part of the industry and being part of a company was a really new experience for me and really solidified where I want to be headed," Maddy says. "My ultimate goal now would be to do applied research in the industry."

Finding Her Interest

Maddy says many of the people in her program grew up in the industry, but she did not have these experiences. Both her parents are college professors, so Maddy was around science at a young age. Their interests, however, are in biology and their research involves dragonflies, not plants.

Maddy first took an interest in plants during her time at Niskayuna High School (near Albany, N.Y.).

"There was this small greenhouse that was a broken-down, old structure attached to my high school," she says. "This small horticulture club was

using it to grow herbs, flowers and some vegetables for a Mother's Day and end-of-year sale, so I got into horticulture at that point."

Maddy not only got involved but also took charge as president of the club for her junior and senior year, working with the club's advisor, Chris Jennings, to get a brand-new, state-of-the-art greenhouse.

"Mr. Jennings had a strong influence in igniting my passion for horticulture," Maddy says. "He caught on to my interest and integrated me into all parts of running the horticulture club — from plant care, to pest troubleshooting, to sales logistics."

When it came time to look at colleges, Maddy knew she wanted to target schools with solid programs to further her newfound interests.

"A large part of why I chose Cornell was because it has such a strong program focused on plants," she says. "Then I took a couple courses with Dr. Bill Miller and his courses really solidified that I was really interested in the horticulture industry."

Growing Outside Cornell

For Maddy, the next step seemed natural: getting an internship where she could really grow beyond her coursework. She spoke with Mike Williams,

Ball Horticultural Co.'s human resources director, when he visited Cornell. This made her realize how great of an opportunity a Ball internship would be for her.

Maddy packed her bags and moved from the East Coast to the Midwest to begin her time in the Premier Seed Lab at Ball in West Chicago, Ill., under the direction of Robert Conrad, seed technology research manager.

"My project evaluated different lighting conditions for seedlings and figuring out if we could change the lighting in the chambers to be more economically and environmentally friendly, more sustainable and efficient," Maddy says.

Much like with her four-year college plan, Maddy chose the different crops she would work with and got to organizing.

"I had my summer planned with sowing the seeds this day, moving them into the germination chambers this day, moving them under the lights this day and testing them with Ball SeedView this day," she says. "Of course, sometimes crops don't cooperate and aren't ready exactly as planned because plants can't read your plan."

Maddy had to re-evaluate and reschedule the

second half of her summer to accommodate these changes, and while challenging at times, Maddy says this taught her a lesson: it all works out in the end.

After months of gathering data that took into account the energy usage, light uniformity and heat uniformity of the different lighting systems, Maddy had to present her findings and any recommendations she had to some of the top executives

at Ball, including Anna Ball, president and CEO of Ball Horticultural Co.

“It’s very nerve-racking to present to the executives, and I had never done any sort of business presentation like this before,” Maddy says, “But it’s a very positive experience, and they want to hear from [the interns]; they’re excited to hear from us.”

During her time at Ball, Maddy also got to

explore different areas of the business, one of which really stood out to her.

“During lunch periods, I would go out and walk through the trial gardens and look at the different plants being developed,” she says. “I definitely am interested in the development of new products and new colors, forms and shapes. Seeing how superior the plants are actually performing in the garden is really cool.”

Her work with Ball spanned beyond Illinois as she traveled with the company to Columbus, Ohio, in July 2013, for OFA Short Course. She arrived early to help Ball set up and select plants for their displays. One of Maddy’s favorite parts of the conference, however, was exploring various companies.

“A lot of people I know knew all the different companies and knew their uncle’s brother’s cousin or some distant family member works for them,” Maddy says. “I don’t have that, so it was really valuable to make connections and talk to people.”

Maddy notes how different the education sessions at OFA were from her classes at Cornell, and she says she is excited to attend many more at OFA this year.

Planning a New Path

OFA Short Course is only one of the many things Maddy is looking forward to this year. First and foremost, she has a few more months as a student at Cornell and all the responsibilities that come with that.

“Maddy has so many positive attributes, and I think of them related to her multi-tasking abilities: the fact that she’s able to be successful in all of her classes as well as the different extracurriculars in her life,” Mattson says.

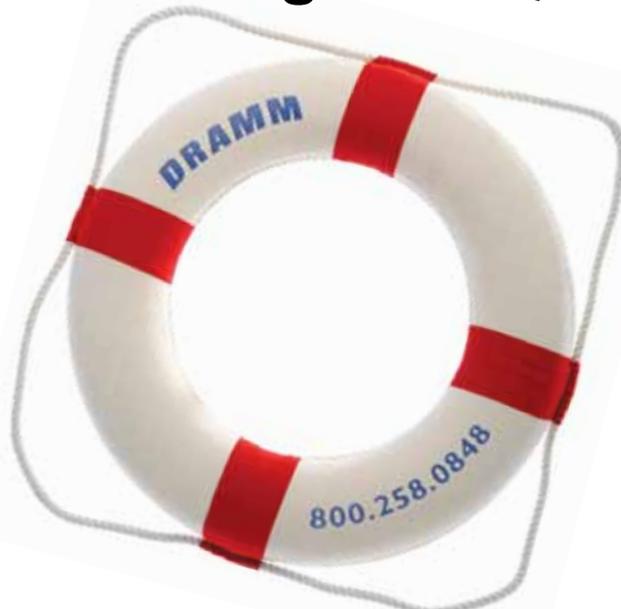
Maddy is the president of Cornell’s undergraduate horticulture club, Hortus Forum, and does research under Dr. Miller with 1-methylcyclopropene (1-MCP) and ethylene-sensitivity in lilies and New Guinea impatiens.

When outside of the greenhouse, Maddy also plays on Cornell’s varsity polo team and is a member of the Alpha Beta chapter of Delta Delta Delta sorority.

“For me, being involved is a vital part of life. I can’t handle not doing more and more,” Maddy says. “There are so many options here at Cornell and just in the world that I can’t imagine not being super involved in everything.”

Even with all these other commitments for the rest of the school year,

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Maddy is not leaving her future to chance as graduation approaches.

She is applying to master's programs with the same vigor as other areas of her life. After she earns a master's degree in horticulture, her next step is a doctorate.

Although Maddy says that right now she looks forward to being a student for the near future, she already has her sights set on a research position in the industry much like that from her internship.

"I know the job that Robert Conrad has is unbelievable. He's in charge of a lab that actually

impacts the industry, and he's constantly coming up with a powerhouse of projects that he is able to continually play out and see how they work," Maddy says. "That kind of job would be a dream come true." 

Abby Klecker is associate editor of GPN magazine. For more information on the GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year scholarship program, contact GPN's editorial director, Tim Hodson, at thodson@sgcmail.com.



RECOGNIZING 15 STANDOUT STUDENTS

For 15 years, GPN and Nexus Corporation have been awarding students who excel both in the classroom and out in the industry. The annual scholarship recognizes these rising stars who travel to new places for an internship that is both valuable for the industry and the student.

"Without an internship, a student would only think they knew how to do something," says Cheryl Longtin, CEO, Nexus Greenhouse Systems. "But with an internship, they can take a risk and learn to be successful."

Longtin says Nexus has an ongoing commitment to supporting students like this year's recipient, Madeleine "Maddy" Olberg, who make extraordinary contributions to their education and illustrate commitment through an internship.

"Madeline's project to test seedlings grown using different light conditions demonstrates a very organized approach. She maximized her internship in ways that helped her learn but also benefited our industry," Longtin says. "It is highly rewarding to hear students who make their dreams a reality."



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