

# 40 40 40 UNDER

## IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

*The 2016 Class of GPN's 40 Under 40 is poised to make big things happen and change the future of our industry.*

**BY TIM HODSON**

**I**'d like you to meet this year's class of GPN's 40 Under 40.

These 18 women and 22 men were nominated by their peers for their accomplishments so far in their careers as well as the potential they have to offer to our industry in the coming years.

This year's class covers a wide spectrum of the industry — growers, researchers, breeders, retailers, green industry communicators and so many more important

positions that make our industry tick.

The one thing they all have in common is they are doers! They make things happen in their own businesses as well as for their diverse customers, their suppliers, the gardening public as well as the rest of the horticulture industry.

Say hello to this year's class! [gpn](#)

*Tim Hodson is GPN's editorial director. He can be reached at [thodson@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:thodson@greatamericanpublish.com).*

### Do You Know Someone?

If you know an individual that is really making a difference in our industry, and is under the age of 40, then we want to know more about that person for next year's class — but not just yet.

Nominations for GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2017 will be accepted on [www.gpnmag.com](http://www.gpnmag.com) beginning in November.

We will provide additional information on how to nominate candidates for next year's class in upcoming issues of GPN and our enewsletter, GPN Weekly.

Brett Alldredge .....	18
Brie Arthur.....	18
Cheryl Atwater .....	18
Traci Barber .....	18
Jared Barnes .....	18
Mark Benoit .....	18
Jason Blanchette.....	20
Tracy Bode.....	20
Jennifer Boldt .....	20
Jessica Boldt .....	20
Evan Boucher .....	20
Dave Brobst .....	20
Leanna Burress .....	22
Aaron Coch.....	22
Fitz Couhig .....	22
Courtney Crawford.....	22
Adam Davino .....	22
Jim Devereux.....	22
Danielle Ernest .....	24
Matt Fratino .....	24
Heather Genrich .....	24
Kristel Gramlich.....	26
Justin Hancock .....	26
Travis Higginbotham Jr.....	26
Allison Hope Justice .....	26
Erin Kelly .....	26
Ryan McGinty .....	26
Seth A. Nicholson .....	28
Meghan Owens.....	28
Qendrim Peci.....	28
Tanisha Robinson .....	30
Shaun Schoonhoven .....	30
Lauren Snyder .....	30
Craig Stevens .....	32
Jacob Stockslager .....	32
Gerardo Suazo.....	32
Tiffany Watson.....	34
Ryan Westover.....	34
Kim Whitman .....	34
Aleksi Yosifov.....	34



## BRETT ALLDREDGE

PEST MANAGEMENT SUPERVISOR  
GREENLEAF NURSERY  
EL CAMPO, TEXAS

### Accomplishments:

- Already a 15-year industry veteran, Brett has worked in all aspects of the industry from landscape installation to plant production to retail consumer sales. "Now I am carrying on my father's legacy as a nurseryman."
- Responsible for managing more than 450 acres of crops and improving company's pest and disease control through trialing products as well as implementing new application techniques and product rotations.

### Budding Artist:

In his rare spare time, Brett likes to break out his acrylics and paint natural landscapes "usually of a foreign location far removed from Texas."

### Surf & Turf?

Brett's favorite foods are sushi and chicken fried steak with red potatoes and peas.

## TRACI BARBER

PERENNIAL MANAGER/SOCIAL MEDIA COORDINATOR  
WOJO'S GREENHOUSE  
ORTONVILLE, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- A graduate of Michigan State University, she is responsible for maintaining and designing the company website to connect with the younger generation, future horticulture professionals and gardeners.
- Organized and oversaw the company's complex perennial planting and production process to help streamline the perennials production department.



### Clarinet Connoisseur:

Traci has played the clarinet for more than 20 years and loves to play it in her spare time. She is a member of the Belle Valley Community Band in Imlay City, Michigan. "My original career path was in music, playing clarinet professionally."

### Down on the Farm:

Traci and her family (husband Andrew, young daughter Elizabeth and Australian Shepherd Bandit) live on Andrew's family's fourth-generation dairy farm.

## BRIE ARTHUR

GARDEN COMMUNICATOR, PRODUCER  
AND CONSULTANT  
BRIE GROWS — HORTICULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS  
AND CONSULTING  
FUQUAY-VARINA, NORTH CAROLINA

### Accomplishments:

- Transitioned from a propagator/grower to focus on green industry communications to help promote the value of horticulture and engage and inspire a diverse audience.
- Served as a national director for the National Garden Writers Association and has signed two book contracts already in 2016.



### To-may-tos, To-mah-tos — For a Good Cause:

One of Brie's hobbies is growing more than 100 heirloom tomato varieties that she trials for heat and humidity tolerance, productivity and nematode

resistance. "We throw a fundraiser every summer, The Tomato Tasting, to share the bounty with our community and raise money for the JCRA Children's Gardening Program."

### Call Her the #CrazyGrainLady:

Brie is obsessed with growing "unusual" edibles in suburban foodscapes and goes to great lengths to harvest and process crops such as cane sorghum and grains like wheat and rice.

## JARED BARNES

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HORTICULTURE  
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN UNIVERSITY  
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

### Accomplishments:

- Earned his master's and PhD degrees in horticultural science from North Carolina State University — summa cum laude for both degrees!
- Engages, encourages and inspires students to think outside the box when it comes to the future of the horticulture industry and gardening. As a graduate student at NCSU, Jared dressed up as Super Seed, a superhero character he developed to illustrate seed germination and the initiation of a plant's life cycle.



### Getting into the Swing of Things:

If there is ever a Dancing with the Horticulture Industry competition, sign Jared up. "I can cut a rug swing dancing."

### Favorite Flick:

"Field of Dreams" has captivated me since being a child. Perhaps it's because the movie is about magic happening in a corn field."

## CHERYL ATWATER

HARD GOODS PLANNER/BUYER  
SMITH GARDENS, INC.  
BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for managing all hard goods purchases across four growing facilities and multiple contract growers in three different states that provide product for five major retailers.
- Helped company to become a three-time recipient of McConkey Co.'s Million Bottle Award and keep 7.7 million plastic water bottles from heading to the landfill.



### The Third State:

Cheryl has been published in the American Anthropological Association's Journal of Consciousness. Her paper reflected a comparative study of vampirism as a third state of consciousness, known as the "liminal state," from both a literary and folkloric perspective.

### On Her Nightstand:

"The House of Spirits" by Isabel Allende. "She is a Chilean author who has blended fictional characters with a historical non-fiction timeline that spans four generations in a single family. It is one of the few books that I immediately re-read as soon as I finished!"



## MARK BENOIT

HEAD GROWER  
BRIGHTFARMS INC.  
ELKWOOD, VIRGINIA

### Accomplishments:

- Participated in the design/build/implementation process of company's new Capitol Greenhouse in Elkwood, Virginia. The 150,000-square-foot greenhouse harvested its first crops earlier this year and is expected to grow nearly 1 million pounds of produce per year.
- Received college degree in agriculture *after* serving in the infantry in Afghanistan for three years in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

### Game On!

Mark recently discovered a passion for playing table tennis. One of his co-workers was the New Jersey state champ and they started playing competitively against each other.

### A Hot and Cold Read:

"A Song of Ice and Fire," the first volume of the A Game of Thrones series by George R. Martin. "Because I'm a huge nerd. And everyone knows this."

## JASON BLANCHETTE

VICE PRESIDENT  
ANDERSON'S  
NEWPORT NEWS AND VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

### Accomplishments:

- Actively involved in the development and creation of Anderson's new retail/restaurant location that opened earlier this spring in Virginia Beach. The store will not only sell plants and landscaping service, but also feature a full service restaurant with bar and conversation patios.
- Serves on the Home and Garden Showplace Advisory Board and was recognized as Home and Garden Showplace's Southern Region Store of the Year.



### In His Spare Time:

Jason likes to participate in rigorous CrossFit training workouts. He also enjoys relaxing and sampling craft bourbons, "but never doing CrossFit while drinking craft bourbon."

### Vacay and Play:

When it comes time for vacation, Jason's favorite spot to escape to is Sombrero Reef in the Florida Keys.

## JESSICA BOLDT

PRODUCTION R&D MANAGER  
PLEASANT VIEW GARDENS  
LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE



### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for developing new liner programs, improving existing programs, providing grower support and growing all promotional plant material. Works with the internal growing team to implement trial results for growing higher quality liners and more

efficient production practices.

- Named Pleasant View Gardens' Employee of the Year and GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year.

### Go Gators:

A University of Florida alum, she is a huge fan of the Gators football team. "I loved attending the games when I was a student and now watch the games on TV. I wear my orange and blue proudly every Saturday in the fall."

### Another Yarn Spinner:

Her sister knits; Jessica crochets. "I never go anywhere without a ball of yarn!" Most of her crochet projects are donated to others like her church, Hospice House and Payson Center for Cancer Care.

### Don't Confuse Her With:

Jessica's twin sister is also in the horticulture industry. See Jennifer Boldt.

## TRACY BODE

ASSOCIATE BUSINESS MANAGER-SPECIALTY  
GARDEN/NORTHEAST REGIONAL SUPPLY MANAGER  
BALL HORTICULTURAL CO.  
WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

### Accomplishments:

- Has worked in a number of areas, including greenhouse production, landscape production, nursery management and now supply chain management.
- Oversaw a large nursery expansion project that converted acreage of field tree and shrub production into above ground, containerized shrub and perennial production.



### Don't Get in Her Way:

Tracy has a competitive streak in her and recently competed in her first Spartan Race, an obstacle course race that involves scaling 7- to 9-foot walls, army crawling under barbed wire and carrying sand bags up and down flights of stairs.

### Can't Live Without:

The library. "I love to read, any kind of book really, fiction or non-fiction, set deep in history or far into the future! One of my favorite series is The Century Trilogy by Ken Follett, which I would recommend to everybody whether you're a reader or not!"



## EVAN BOUCHER

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT/IPM COORDINATOR  
GREEN CIRCLE GROWERS  
OBERLIN, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Manages the company's biological programs on crops such as poinsettia, Pelee mums, gerbera and peppers. Evaluates the performance of new varieties and has developed techniques to help improve company's data collection and storage.
- Responsible for initializing and the ongoing trialing/advising of company's Watercolored Orchids program, which involves dyeing orchids new colors.

### He is Always Prepared:

An Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America, Evan enjoys tent camping and fishing. "I can, and have started a fire with just two sticks, while it was raining."

### Favorite Flick:

"Jurassic Park." "Mostly due to me being a pretty big 'dinosaur kid' while I was growing up." He's also a fan of Steven King.

## JENNIFER BOLDT

RESEARCH HORTICULTURIST  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE  
TOLEDO, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Established a research program examining how environmental factors and cultural practices influence growth and development of greenhouse crops.
- Managed the annual trial garden at the University of Florida for three years. During that time, the university added a winter trial and more than doubled the number of cultivars evaluated in the spring/summer trial.



### Try to Keep Up:

Jennifer is an avid runner who ran her first marathon two years ago. So far she has run four marathons with more to come in the future.

### Spins a Good Yarn:

Five years ago, she taught herself how to knit. "It's a very useful hobby when you live in a northern climate! I wear hand-knit socks almost daily."

### Don't Confuse Her With:

Jennifer's twin sister is also in the horticulture industry. See Jessica Boldt.

## DAVE BROBST

IT MANAGER  
PLEASANT VIEW GARDENS  
LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

### Accomplishments:

- Developed a custom costing database program that helps the company manage its cost structure and analyze its margins across all of its different products.
- Developed analytical databases called cubes that allow the company to perform very powerful data analysis, and make business decisions based on otherwise hard to find facts about the business.



### A Former DIY-er:

Dave renovated his first house. "It took six years of demolition, framing, roofing, plumbing, sheet rocking, painting and electrical work. It was very rewarding, but I decided to hang up my tool belt, sell the house and spend my time on other things."

### Can't Live Without:

A very large cup of tea every morning to get the day started off right.



## LEANNA BURRESS

ACCOUNT MANAGER/PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT  
COLOR POINT  
GRANVILLE, ILLINOIS

### Accomplishments:

- Created new plant concepts that have been offered by retailers on a national level and helped introduce a successful line of seasonal miniature plants to a national grocery chain.
- Responsible for all account details from product development to sales and shipping schedules. She sources and imports upgraded packaging options for product and builds retailer specific programs.

### Fly the Friendly Skies:

Leanna grew up on a family farm/produce business but left the horticulture industry for a few years to become a flight attendant. She still loves to travel but loves returning to her small town atmosphere. "It's the best of both worlds!"

### What's on the Menu?

Any kind of seafood (being from the Midwest), good wine and Havarti cheese... "It's not a party without Havarti!!"

## COURTNEY CRAWFORD

ACCOUNT MANAGER  
WILLOWAY NURSERY  
HILLIARD, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for the production of more than 700,000 plants and was promoted to head grower of propagation department before turning 25.
- Worked with perennial and herb growers to develop crop recipes, schedules and production plans and secure plant material and supplies for propagation department.



### From Kitchen to Table:

One of Courtney's favorite pastimes is cooking. She likes to make homemade lasagna with fresh garlic bread. Some of her other favorite foods include chicken parmesan and homemade chicken, bacon and ranch pizza.

### No One Trick Pony:

Courtney has been riding horses since she was seven years old and has owned a Morgan horse for nearly 15 years. Being at the horse barn has "really taught me a lot about patience, respect and the appreciation for learning from others who may not always think like you!"

## AARON COCH

IT MANAGER  
FOUR STAR GREENHOUSE INC.  
CARLETON, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- Developed advanced automation processes across five transplant lines; each supporting up to 24 users. Each tray produced is assigned a unique ID, allowing employee and variety information to be associated at the individual tray level.
- Responsible for the development of integrated solutions to grow the business-to-consumer side of business. This includes the integration of established online retailers, as well as the development of custom online storefronts.



### A Good Sport:

Aaron's hobbies include being outdoors and watching and playing sports. In fact, "some people may be surprised to find out that a computer nerd played a few seasons of semi-pro football."

### Eye of the Tiger:

When Aaron was growing up, his father coached and trained boxers including the former champion Oscar De La Hoya, when he was training for the Junior Olympics.

## ADAM DAVINO

JOSEPH DAVINO & SONS GREENHOUSE  
OWNER  
MILLSTONE, NEW JERSEY

### Accomplishments:

- Automated the greenhouse's production lines to increase efficiencies, diversified the different products the company offers and expanded its customer base into a greater footprint.
- Responsible for overseeing sales, production, construction and purchasing and has taken a 3.5-acre range and increased total acreage to 10 acres under glass with an additional 40 acres of outdoor production.



### Pick From Adam's Bookshelf:

"Lone Survivor" by Markus Luttrell and Patrick Robinson. "It was one of the most incredible stories that I have ever read of determination and perseverance. It showed heroism and compassion from an unlikely source."

### An Enlightened Grandfather:

Adam's grandfather worked as an accountant for Thomas Edison.

## FITZ COUHIG

CEO  
PIONEER NUGGETS  
ARLINGTON, WASHINGTON

### Accomplishments:

- As a mitigation professional, he helped arrange the purchase and management of more than 15,000 acres of wetlands that are now under perpetual servitude.
- Founded Pioneer Nuggets and successfully brought a craft cannabis flower product to the Washington State market.



### A Grand Adventure:

An avid outdoorsman and adventurer, Fitz paddled the entire 287 miles of the Grand Canyon over a 25-day period in December 2014. "Nothing prepares one for three Class 8 rapids in a four-hour stretch. It was cold, but not as cold as you would think. Adrenaline is wonderful."

### On Dry Land:

The one thing he cannot live without is water, "but I prefer when it is in a craft beer or an excellent coffee."



## JIM DEVEREUX

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER  
DÜMMEN ORANGE  
FORT COLLINS, COLORADO/COLUMBUS, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Has worked in many different facets of the industry, including as a grower, retailer, broker-salesperson and nursery manager.
- Through his personal travels and own trials, he has worked with breeders all over the globe to bring different plants to the market. "I've always enjoyed the back room."

### Favorite Flick/Book:

"Catch 22" by Joseph Heller. "I have always enjoyed the idea that if you want to do something, you must be crazy and can't, while if you don't want to do something you must be perfect for the job."

### Double the Fun:

Jim and his wife have twin boys, Holden and Killian, who "keep me rolling every day with their wit and biting sarcasm."

## DANIELLE ERNEST

OWNER  
FLORA & FAUNA MEDIA  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

### Accomplishments:

- Conceptualized a new business, sought feedback from peers on the concept, and then successfully launched a marketing and media relations company.
- She is a published author on multiple platforms including the DIY Network, Better Homes & Gardens, Fine Gardening and multiple industry trade publications.



### Spreading the Word:

Danielle is interested in the history behind plants and loves to write articles that look at historical references to better understand a genera. She loves to share her knowledge about specific categories especially edibles. In 2015, she wrote 30+ online articles for the DIY Network on topics like carrots, sweet potatoes and beets.

### Media Runs in the Family:

Danielle's great-grandfather founded a newspaper in Climax, Michigan, in 1912. When she was younger, Danielle would help her grandparents as they produced the weekly newspaper. She hopes to write her own newspaper column on gardening in the future.



## MATTHEW FRATINO

PRESIDENT  
PERISHABLE TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS  
FOREST PARK, GEORGIA

### Accomplishments:

- Founded a logistics company with the vision to streamline the import process of young plant shipments into Atlanta, Georgia — at the age of 23.
- Over the last 10 years, helped take the USDA plant inspection in Atlanta from number 15 in number of units received in the U.S. to number 2 (3.9 million in 2006 to now approximately 200 million units).

### Gotta Be Near It:

Water. "Whether it is the ocean or a lake — the peace of mind I get with being by the water. I just love the calm and relaxed setting."

### Who Knew?

As a boy growing up in Orlando, Matt played on the same Little League baseball team with all-star pitcher Zack Greinke of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

## HEATHER GENRICH

HEAD GROWER/GREENHOUSE MANAGER  
GENRICH'S GARDEN CENTER AND GREENHOUSES  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK



### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for all greenhouse operations including planning, ordering, planting and production for independent garden centers.
- Participant in OFA's HortScholars program that exposes college students to the many different opportunities the horticulture industry offers with a focus on their professional development and future career options.

### Get in Line:

Heather likes to go line dancing. "I try to go once a week when I have down time before spring is here and we are crazy busy at the store. It is relaxing and fun to learn something different."

### Books or Movies?

Heather likes both! "I love to read books that are then made into movies. I like to compare the story line and characters."

Smart.  
Inventive.  
Dedicated.

We're all very  
proud of you,  
Leanna.



From creating new plant concepts for our national clients to your resourceful packaging ideas, you've earned this 40 Under 40 recognition. Thank you for setting an example of what it means to be a part of Color Point.



## KRISTEL GRAMLICH

OWNER  
PLANTASY DESIGNS  
AUBURN, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- The company's product, Classic Vertical G(art)en kit, was named #1 Best in the West by Sunset magazine and a Top 100 New Products of the year by This Old House magazine.
- Created a living billboard in Sacramento City Hall to bring awareness to low water use plants and the city's lawn replacement rebate program.

### Best Book:

"The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. "It beautifully lays out the importance of following one's path. Coelho eloquently brings to light that although simple in concept, it may not be easy in practice, but it's ever so important to being fulfilled and satisfied."

### Stay or Go?

Kristel enjoys taking staycations on her yoga mat followed by relaxing on a grassy spot under a tree. She also likes to get away and enjoy the coast or to a hot springs location.

## ALLISON HOPE JUSTICE

OWNER/OPERATOR  
BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE SYSTEMS  
FAIR PLAY, SOUTH CAROLINA

### Accomplishments:

- Owns and operates two different businesses — a commercial greenhouse operation as well as Biological Defense Systems that provides a way for growers to rear their own entomopathogenic nematodes in-house.
- Earned her doctorate in ornamental horticulture from Clemson University.

### On Her Nightstand:

The Outlander Series by Diana Gabaldon. "It is the perfect mix between mystery, history and romance. It is also based around all of Scotland which is neat because I've spent a good deal of time in Scotland."



### A Family Tree with Deep Horticultural Roots:

Almost all of Allison's family is involved with plants. Her maternal grandparents were cotton farmers and her paternal grandmother was a florist. Her sister and brother-in-law are landscape architects and she grew up on an ornamental tree farm, which led her to the green industry.

## JUSTIN HANCOCK

CONSUMER MARKETING AND DIGITAL SPECIALIST  
COSTA FARMS  
MIAMI, FLORIDA

### Accomplishments:

- Spent 10 years on the editorial staff at Better Homes & Gardens, producing gardening content for the website and magazine for more than 8 million people in North America. Made multiple appearances on NBC's Today show.
- Has worked in a number of sectors of the industry including a small-town florist, at greenhouses and garden centers, as a landscaper, a groundskeeper, and currently at one of the largest growers in the country.



### His Nickname is Google Plant:

"A lot of people that meet me are surprised at how quickly I pick up and remember plant names — like I'm some Latin-name savant ... some folks have told me asking me is quicker than doing a Google search. It's like my brain has a plant database feature built in."

### Can't Live Without:

Dark chocolate. While working at BHG, Justin was on the tasting panel for a special-interest issue devoted to chocolate. "It was heaven!"

## ERIN KELLY

PRODUCTION MANAGER  
NORTH CREEK NURSERIES  
LANDENBERG, PENNSYLVANIA

### Accomplishments:

- As the company has grown, she helped transition the production team into a new facility with all new equipment and growing practices. Also responsible for creating the production schedules and securing the source material for diverse plant material the company produces.
- Assists with company's family vegetable garden that benefits employees and their families — 50 families, 40 weeks a year, over 16,494 pounds, including 3 tons of potatoes, onions, on 1 acre — approximately 8 pounds of food per family per week.



### Woman's Best Friend:

Erin enjoys spending time with "the love of my life," Roxy, a mixed bluetick hound. "After a long, hard day at work, nothing makes me happier than to come home to Roxy. I aspire to be as amazing as she thinks I am."

### Favorite Vacation Spot:

The Outer Banks of North Carolina

## TRAVIS HIGGINBOTHAM JR.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER  
BATTLEFIELD FARMS INC.  
RAPIDAN, VIRGINIA

### Accomplishments:

- Tried a new greenhouse LED lighting system and then successfully implemented the lighting system into full-scale production.
- Through trials and collaboration helped create an in-house rearing system of four species of nematodes for controlling fungus gnats, shore flies and Western flower thrips.



### In His Spare Time:

Travis presses and frames multiple species of plants that he sells at local shops and markets. He also plays piano — when he started college he was pursuing a degree in classical piano performance before he changed majors.

### Duty Calls:

Travis's father was a colonel in the United States Army so he has lived all over the United States and Europe. When he moved to Virginia to work for Battlefield, it was the 19th place he has lived.



## RYAN MCGINTY

FARM MANAGER, OXFORD FACILITY  
NORTH CREEK NURSERIES  
LANDENBERG, PENNSYLVANIA

### Accomplishments:

- Helped facilitate the successful implementation and continued process of Lean Flow throughout Oxford facility. It has increased profitability as well as ongoing team member satisfaction.
- Also developed the company's Working Smarter training program to increase productivity and meet the increased needs of customers. Company was able to ship 20 percent more product within the same footprint and without major increase in team's workload.

### Ingredients for a Good Time:

The sun, the water, his wife and his fishing gear. "When the weather is fine, I spend every free minute on the Chesapeake Bay on Deale Island with my entire family."

### Diverse Reading Material:

"I really keep my nose in reference books about plants but, when I have time I drink in every word of the Game of Thrones book series."



## SETH A. NICHOLSON

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
THE BRUCE COMPANY OF WISCONSIN  
MIDDLETON, WISCONSIN

### Accomplishments:

- Oversees the company's operations in the retail garden center, landscape design, construction and maintenance, irrigation, ponds, interiorscapes, snow removal and approximately 500-acre nursery and 350 employees.
- After a family emergency, assumed leadership position of the company and was responsible for all corporate operations including establishing ongoing, close communications with all department management to ensure company continued to run smoothly.

### The Safe Pick?

When he was younger, Seth spent all of his time snowboarding and even considered going pro, but settled for several years of semi-pro competition. "After a few broken bones, I decided to stick with the green industry."

### In the DVD Player:

"Rain Man." "It is a very inspirational and funny movie about overcoming personal and family challenges."

## MEGHAN OWENS

KEY ACCOUNT MANAGER-RETAIL  
SYNGENTA FLOWERS  
PORTLAND, MAINE/GILROY, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Identify trends, opportunities and challenges in the marketplace and develop strategic plans for customers and the company.
- Works with customers and helps support key distributors and reps in the Northeast to increase sales and market presence.

### She's a Competitor:

She enjoys running and has participated in marathons and half-marathons and loves to golf. "I pretty much like anything competitive, whether it is competing against myself or someone else."



### Not Many People Know:

Meghan is ambidextrous. "When I was in first grade I would write across half the page with my left hand and then switch to my right. They made me pick one, so I chose left ... I attribute my terrible sense of direction and shaky ability to describe things being on the left or right to this."

## QENDRIM PEÇI

LOCATION MANAGER  
KURT WEISS GREENHOUSES  
CENTER MORICHES, NEW YORK

### Accomplishments:

- As location manager, he is responsible for the operations of more than 18 acres of plant production.
- Manages production processes, handles personnel issues and communicates with a diverse workforce that speaks many different languages.

### During His Downtime:

Qendrim likes to write (his first book will be published soon), go for walks with his wife and play soccer. "I have been playing since I was a small boy and if I didn't become a horticulturist I would probably have ended up being a soccer player."



### Favorite Flick:

"The Great Debaters." "It is very moving, inspiring and informative. It shows us a part of history that we must not forget and it also teaches us that only through education we will free our minds and our bodies as well."

Manufacturer of Quality Greenhouses

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## TANISHA ROBINSON

ASSISTANT PLANT PATHOLOGIST  
BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY  
WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

**Accomplishments:**

- Responsible for tracking virus movement in a greenhouse setting to identify specific activities and practices which influence the spread of the virus, and analyzing information to develop and implement improved sanitation protocols during the breeding process.
- Discovered a blackberry virus that had never before been reported on a popular ornamental phlox cultivar.

**When It Comes to Hobbies:**

Tanisha has an adventurous streak in her — she enjoys kayaking, indoor rock climbing and has even tried indoor skydiving. “I also enjoy driving my co-workers insanely crazy by singing loudly and off-key to lyrics from many music genres while working in the lab.”

**Seafood Delight:**

Originally from the Chesapeake Bay area, Tanisha loves seafood. Whenever she goes home, she has to stop at her favorite seafood restaurant Catch 31 Fish House and Bar overlooking the ocean in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

## SHAUN SCHOONHOVEN

RETAIL TEAM LEAD  
METROLINA GREENHOUSES  
HUNTERVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

**Accomplishments:**

- Works with one of the largest mass merchandise retailers to continually drive product freshness initiatives.
- Collaborates with suppliers and breeders to develop innovative strategies that help drive the industry forward and provide consumers with new products.



**Chef Shaun:**

One of his favorite hobbies is cooking. “I watch a ridiculous amount reality cooking shows and studying cooking techniques on YouTube. I enjoy watching people preparing dishes and then making them my own.”

**Hidden Talent?**

Singing. “My karaoke abilities, especially when it comes to Eminem.”

**Gotta Watch It:**

“Moulin Rouge.” “I love the foreshadowing, the music, the costumes and the style.”

## LAUREN (TUSKI) SNYDER

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST  
AMERICANHORT  
COLUMBUS, OHIO



**Accomplishments:**

- Leads the marketing strategy for several industry events and segments such as Plug & Cutting Conference, NextLevel and SHIFT Initiative. She contributes to all of the organization’s other marketing projects.
- Recipient of the Michigan State

University College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Outstanding Leader Award and was named the GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year.

**A New Family Tradition:**

Lauren and her husband Paul are high school sweethearts. “He proposed where my dad proposed to my mom in the woods on my parents’ property.”

**Top Getaway Spot:**

Northern Michigan. “It’s a different world up there — you feel like all of your problems get left behind, and you don’t have to drive that far. It lets you enjoy the simple pleasures — nature, hiking, family and friends, and good food and beer.”

Ball Horticultural Company salutes our 40 under 40 winners. Thank you for all you do.



**TRACY BODE**  
REGIONAL SUPPLY MANAGER NE



**TANISHA ROBINSON**  
ASSISTANT PLANT PATHOLOGIST



## CRAIG STEVENS

SALES REPRESENTATIVE  
HENRY F. MICHELL CO.  
KING OF PRUSSIA, PENNSYLVANIA



**Accomplishments:**

- As a broker rep, he works with grower customers to share his expertise and knowledge and provide them with a better understanding of product offerings and help them be successful.
- Along with his brother, he co-owns and operates a successful full-service garden center in Western Michigan.

**Extra Curricular Activities:**

In his spare time, Craig likes to go hunting or travel and hang out with his wife Sara and their three children, Owen, Nina and Jude.

**Enjoys the Wild Life:**

When he was 12 years old, Craig had the opportunity to go deer hunting with the Motor City Madman, aka Ted Nugent, and was featured on one of Nugent's hunting TV shows.

## JACOB STOCKSLAGER

GROWER  
STOCKSLAGER'S GREENHOUSE AND GARDEN CENTER  
NEW LEBANON, OHIO

**Accomplishments:**

- Continually researching and trialing new techniques to help make greenhouse production more efficient and profitable.
- Passionate and driven to inspire other team members and always looks for new opportunities.



**Dayton History Buff:**

Jacob likes to learn about the history and the people from Dayton like the Wright Brothers and the founder of NCR. "These are great and innovative people to look at for inspiration. They help drive my passion, because these individuals were relentless and did not give up. In turn, they contributed great things to our society."

**Favorite Bookmark:**

www.TED.com. To further enhance his education, Jacob likes to watch the inspirational and informative speakers on TED Talks — "the subjects are very interesting to me."



## GERARDO SUAZO

LEAD TECHNICAL SERVICES AND TECHNICAL TRIALS  
SYNGENTA FLOWERS HOME & GARDEN  
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

**Accomplishments:**

- Led several projects to develop new technologies for the greenhouse industry. Co-inventor of two provisional patents (filed 2013, and 2016), and one design patent (2016).
- Worked in special projects to accelerate product development; training interns, designing trials, developing protocols, data analytics and product specs for bedding plants.

**Can't Live Without It:**

Mexican food, especially homemade guacamole, and his wife's recipe for roasted rajas poblanas (poblano strips) with cheese, chicken, and corn kernels "... and of course don't forget the hot salsa too."

**In the Pool, Swimmers Rule:**

In his younger days, Gerardo was a competitive swimmer in his native Mexico.

Smith Gardens  
congratulates Cheryl Atwater  
on her selection to GPN's  
2016 40 under 40!



Cheryl Atwater, Hard Goods Planner and Buyer. Since 2009 Cheryl has been purchasing hard good materials across 4 growing facilities which has led her to being the recipient of the Million Bottle Award from McConkey Company's Earth product line, and has saved over 7.7 million water bottles from heading to the landfills. She fully embraces the motto 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'.



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## IN A CLASS OF THEIR OWN



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## TIFFANY WATSON

HEAD GROWER  
RITTER GREENHOUSES  
BRIDGETON, MISSOURI

### Accomplishments:

- Detail-oriented and continually looking for new ways to “raise the bar” and develop higher quality standards for growing plants while training and mentoring others.
- Started as a seasonal grower and promoted three times in less than two years to current position of head grower.



### Hairy Situation:

“My hair is very long so I can’t live without a hair tie to keep my hair in line. I [always] keep my hair braided so that it’s out of the way. I can forget my phone, wallet, lunch or anything else at home for a day, but never a hair tie.”

### Escape to the Windy City:

A native of southern Illinois, Chicago is one of her favorite getaway destinations. “Chicago has it all — unique foods and cultures, a plethora of museums and institutions, shopping, beautifully landscaped public areas and, in my humble opinion, the best pizza in the universe.”



## KIM WHITMAN

TECHNICAL MARKETING MANAGER  
BIOWORKS INC.  
VICTOR, NEW YORK

### Accomplishments:

- Creates educational content, timely campaigns and improved customer interfaces to better deliver appropriate content for both small and larger audiences. Works with technical services team to create educational content for customer use.
- Taught a weeklong class on web page design and implementation at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

### Outstanding in Her Field:

Was the team captain of her college softball team (SUNY-Cortland) and named to the all tournament team that eventually placed fifth in the nation.

### No Name Required:

Kim’s favorite food is buffalo chicken pizza from a local restaurant. “I’m on a first name basis with everyone at the Pontillo’s near BioWorks and don’t even have to give my order because I’m there so frequently.”

## RYAN WESTOVER

FACILITIES MANAGER  
DICKMAN FARMS  
AUBURN, NEW YORK

### Accomplishments:

- Oversees all operations of 10 acres of production facilities and was the lead person when company implemented a new software suite including new servers, network infrastructure and wireless installation.
- Designed and implemented new shipping system that helped increase overall efficiency, inventory accuracy and 20 percent in labor during the company’s busy liner season.



### Easy Rider:

To relax, Ryan likes to jump on his motorcycle and hit the road with his friends — anything from a short afternoon ride to strapping the bags on the bikes and going away for the weekend.

### It’s Not a Small World:

One of his favorite places to vacation is Walt Disney World. “I love the over-the-top attention to even the smallest details.”

## ALEKSI YOSIFOV

LEAD GROWER  
PLEASANT VIEW GARDENS  
LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

### Accomplishments:

- Manages sophisticated mechanical systems such as mist management equipment, bio-mass boilers and greenhouse control systems that allow him to produce the optimal growing environments and grow a diverse number of crops.
- Maintains positive outlook and always focuses on finding the right solutions to any problems. Leads team members by example and shows mutual respect and trust for the other growers on staff.



### He Keeps Going and Going and Going:

Aleksi is always on the move in the greenhouse making sure things get done and done right. “My co-workers say that I am the Energizer bunny of the growing team.”

### It’s All About Relationships:

He became a father recently and one of his favorite movies is “Finding Nemo.” “I like it because it touches on the relationship between father and son.”