

The 10th Annual

**Forty**  
under **40**GPN's 40 Under 40 program  
is celebrating a decade of  
recognizing the horticulture  
industry's bright future.

10 Years and Counting

*Meet the Class*  
*of* **2021**

BY TIM HODSON

**T**his year marks the 10th anniversary of GPN's 40 Under 40 program where we recognize the young men and women who are setting the direction for the horticulture industry's future.

Like the previous nine classes, the Class of 2021 represents the entire spectrum of the horticulture industry — from plant breeder to retail expert and a little bit of everything in between.

These 21 women and 19 men, and the previous 360 honorees, are all outstanding at doing their jobs and also have a wide variety of interests in their pursuits when they are off of the clock.

Among other things, this year's class features a

pair of Eagle scouts, two EAGL graduates, four Ph.D.s, multiple master's degrees, a one-time "American Idol" applicant, a novelist, a family biographer/bagpipe player, a bicycle road racer and a salamander chaperone. The 1990 movie "Goodfellas" starring Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci also seems to be a hit with the Class of 2021 as three of this year's honorees picked it as their favorite flick.

The one thing they *all* have in common is they were nominated by their peers for their professional and personal accomplishments. And now you have an opportunity to meet this year's class and learn a little more about them!

Introducing the Class of 2021 ...

Heather Bach  
Kait Barry  
Victoria Bolden  
Nathan Carney  
Elizabeth Carr  
Mickey Clickner  
Kenna Cole  
Alisha Marie Conde  
Jessica Crabtree  
Justin Davis  
Noah Derohanian  
Cheryl DeVito  
Kevin Espiritu  
Nick Flax  
Lori Fry  
Amy Gard'ner  
Dan Gillespie  
Ryan Glover  
George Grant  
Esteban Herrera  
Ryan Hop  
Liz Hughes  
Susan Judd  
Alex Kantor  
Justin Keeler  
Lauren Kirchner  
Melinda Knuth  
Andrew Konicki  
Judson LeCompte  
Laura Masor  
Jill Mullaney  
Michelle Opela  
Kit Leider Pierri  
Adalice Powers  
Rizaniño "Riz" Reyes  
Jon Russell  
Debalina Saha  
Maxwell Salinger  
Sean Sangster  
Karin Walters

**Nominations for Next Year's  
Class Open in November**

Do you know any potential candidates for the Class of 2022 of GPN's 40 Under 40?

If you do, we will begin accepting nominations for next year's class on Nov. 1, 2021.

You can nominate a young horticultural professional who you feel belongs in the Class of 2022 (and will be under the age of 40 as of Jan. 31, 2022) — but you'll have to wait until November to fill out the online nomination form on [www.gpnmag.com](http://www.gpnmag.com).

Previously nominated individuals who have not been selected for prior classes are eligible to be nominated again, as long as they are still under the age of 40.

Questions about GPN's 40 Under 40 program can be directed to Tim Hodson, editorial director, at [thodson@greatamericanpublish.com](mailto:thodson@greatamericanpublish.com).







## Heather Bach

VICE PRESIDENT  
KOBACORP.  
MIDDLESEX, NEW JERSEY

### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for overseeing company's production, material procurement, AND direct sales along with international sales team and complete financial management.
- Always willing to roll up her sleeves and get her hands dirty, she is enthusiastic and passionate for the industry, the company, its employees and customers while maintaining the right balance of work and family.

### Off the Clock:

When she's not working, Heather enjoys spending time outdoors or traveling with her husband and four children.

### Company's Family Tree:

Heather's father-in-law and the founder of Koba Corp., Franz Bach, Sr., came to America in 1957 with only \$5 in his pocket and was able to launch the 55-year-old company in less than a decade.



## Kait Barry

RETAIL BUSINESS MANAGER  
GRIFFIN GREENHOUSE SUPPLY  
TEWKSBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

### Accomplishments:

- Helped company increase retail department sales 60% in five years by building strong vendor relationships, creating sales programs and keeping up with market trends to stay relevant.
- Continually making an impact by participating on multiple company committees such as ecommerce, technology advancements, company culture and succession planning.

### In Her Spare Time:

Kait loves to travel, try different foods and meet new people. "I also love to create scrapbooks for the different places I have traveled to and for special moments in my life."

### On Her Bucket List:

Running in the Boston Marathon. She recently completed her first half-marathon and has set her sights on the world's oldest annual marathon (all 26 miles and 385 yards of it).

## Elizabeth Carr

PRICING MANAGER  
SYNGENTA FLOWERS  
GILROY, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Helped transform company's customer service team into a cohesive, collaborative and efficient unit by standardizing processes and promoting more training to elevate their performances while delivering exceptional customer service.
- Enhanced internal pricing processes and operations, which increased customer satisfaction while also saving company time in multiple departments.

### Motherly Instincts:

As a single mother, Elizabeth has "found deep motivation to improve myself personally and professionally to provide the best possible life for my little one." She uses her experience to help other moms as leader of her church's first ever single-moms group.

### She's a Spudwoman:

Elizabeth's favorite food is potatoes. "Yes, I know that is weird, but they are so versatile!"



## Victoria Bolden

PRODUCTION ADMINISTRATOR  
NORTH CREEK NURSERIES  
LANDENBERG, PENNSYLVANIA

### Accomplishments:

- Learned how to use multiple software programs to keep company's production plan running smoothly to produce thousands of perennial liners every week.
- Responsible for managing company's cutting and stock crews and purchases for stock, cuttings, grasses and bare root materials. Also manages the harvest and planting of 3.3 mm cuttings from company's own stock.

### When It Comes to Money Matters:

Victoria successfully completed the Ramsey Financial Coach Master Training program "which allows me to confidently coach people on personal finances and financial freedom."

### She's Also a Wordsmith:

When she's not in the greenhouse, Victoria enjoys writing fiction. In 2020, she published her first novel, "Aqua 1 — Over the Brine."



## Mickey Clickner

BEDDING PLANT MANAGER  
TALLAHASSEE NURSERIES  
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

### Accomplishments:

- Coordinates the donation of vegetables and flowers to local schools and churches. Hosts and co-organizes nursery's Little Gardener Grow Club, where kids aged 4-12 participate in fun and educational gardening activities.
- Responsible for stocking over 120 varieties of vegetables, 30-50 varieties of annuals and 30-50 varieties of perennials from 20+ wholesale nurseries across the Southeast.

### A Place with Roots:

Mickey recently purchased his first home and no longer needs "to dig up plants and move an embarrassing amount of containers" every few years like he did when he was renting.

### Can't Live Without:

His music playlist on his phone. "It's the soundtrack to a good day, bad day, road trip or the ride home from work."

## Nathan Garney

SENIOR EQUIPMENT SUPPORT  
SPECIALIST/KEY ACCOUNT MANAGER  
PROFILE PRODUCTS  
BUFFALO GROVE, ILLINOIS

### Accomplishments:

- Member of the company's team that researched and commercially launched a new growing substrate (HydraFiber) and related processing equipment for the horticulture market.
- Manages relationships with company's equipment partners, which includes supporting over 100 pieces of substrate processing equipment in 28 states, and seven countries on five continents.

### A Motivated Reader:

Nathan's go-to book is "Can't Hurt Me" by David Goggins. "It motivates me to get tasks done. At the end of the day you need to hold yourself accountable at the highest regard."

### Gotta Go Outside:

All of his hobbies revolve around the outdoors. He is an avid golfer and trail runner. He also enjoys scuba diving, kayaking, paddle boarding and hiking.





# *Congratulations Justin!*

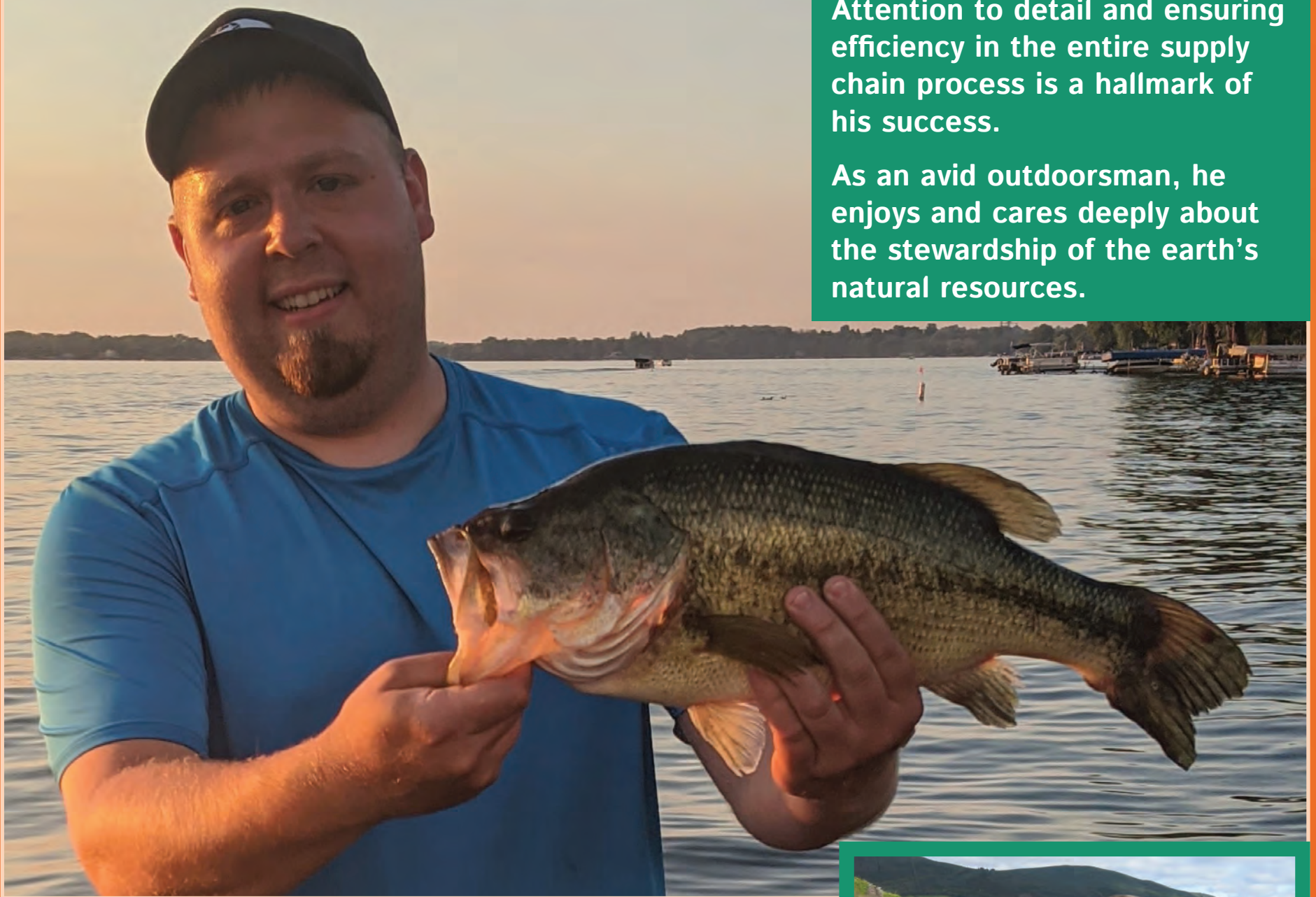
The BioWorks® team salutes our own Justin Davis for being selected as part of GPN's Class of 2021

**Forty**  
under **40**

As Supply Chain Manager, Justin demonstrates the best of BioWorks' core purpose and values.

Attention to detail and ensuring efficiency in the entire supply chain process is a hallmark of his success.

As an avid outdoorsman, he enjoys and cares deeply about the stewardship of the earth's natural resources.



We are very proud to have Justin as part of the BioWorks family.



**BioWorks®**





## Kenna Cole

### PLANNER

D.S. COLE GROWERS  
LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

#### Accomplishments:

- Helped streamline company's plant production processes in the greenhouse. She says it's still a work in progress, but every year they are closer to having a more efficient process from production to shipping.
- With more than 1,000 line items of both young plants and finished product, she coordinates the purchasing of the company's inputs at the right time and right quantity.

#### A Woman in High Places:

Kenna once climbed Mount Washington, the highest peak in the Northeastern United States (nearly 6,300 feet) in five hours.

#### Chef Kenna:

In her spare time, Kenna likes to experiment in the kitchen, more specifically baking new recipes like choux pastry with crème patisserie. Her favorite snack food that she can't live without is sour gummy worms.



## Alisha Marie Conde

### NURSERY MANAGER

CAROLINA NATIVE NURSERY  
BURNSVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

#### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for conducting long form experiments and recording the resulting data to choose best practices to implement at native plant nursery.
- Supervises the production of tens of thousands of seed-grown Eastern U.S. native azaleas with an eye on continual improvement of company's standard operating procedures coupled with aspects of a lean operation.

#### Favorite Flick:

"Big Trouble in Little China" — "I could watch it once a day every day for the rest of my life and still laugh at how horribly silly it is."

#### Why Did the Salamander Cross the Road?

Every year near the end of April, Alisha and her family go to New York to help yellow spotted salamanders cross roads and trails on their way to spawning pools.

## Jessica Crabtree

### GROWING MANAGER

WEGMAN'S ORGANIC FARM & ORCHARD  
CANANDAIGUA, NEW YORK

#### Accomplishments:

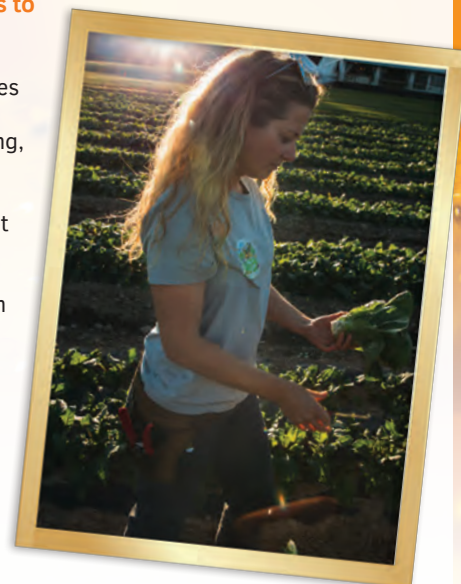
- Responsible for growing diverse organic crops for grocery chain and maintaining a cooperative spirit among her staff. "Growing organically is about fostering harmony and helping to inspire balance every day in the field."
- Started a Community Supported Agriculture operation from the ground up at a farm she partnered with in Pennsylvania.

#### When it Comes to Hobbies:

Jessica loves outdoor activities including gardening, hiking, camping and cross-country skiing. "I cannot live without growing and cooking my own food."

#### A Passion for Growing:

"The New Organic Grower" by Eliot Coleman is her favorite book. "I read it when I first started to embrace my passion for growing food for market and it inspired me and has shaped my journey."



# Congratulations!

**Amy Gard'ner** and **Elizabeth Carr** for being named in GPN's Forty Under 40 Class of 2021!



**Amy Gard'ner** has excelled in her role as product manager of seed annuals over the last 3 years. With a keen eye for outstanding genetics and a clear understanding of grower needs, Amy has been central in successful launches of innovative seed products, including Cora® XDR Vinca and newly introduced Endurance™ Interspecific Marigolds.

**We appreciate your deep product knowledge and professionalism, Amy!**



**Elizabeth Carr** is our Pricing Manager and one of our most collaborative and dependable team members. We are proud of her versatility and leadership when transforming the customer service team to become more cohesive and efficient. She is proud of each team member's contribution to delivering the business's goals, as she believes everyone's work is a key element to success.

**We are proud of your lifelong learning mindset to solve problems, Elizabeth!**





# Forty under 40

Congratulations, Ryan!

As COO and part of the third generation leadership, Ryan has been deeply invested in the success of Walters Gardens. We're excited to see his contributions to Walters Gardens and our industry recognized with this award and look forward to what he will do in the future!







## Justin Davis

**SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGER**  
BIOWORKS  
VICTOR, NEW YORK

### Accomplishments:

- Led a team that successfully launched a Warehouse Management System, which increased the overall organization of the company's warehouse, providing more efficient management of inventory and accuracy of daily transactions.
- Earned "Certified in Production and Inventory Management" designation demonstrating mastery of an organization's internal operations and supply chain management.
- Leads company's Logistics Team, is a member of the Operations Leadership Team and a member of Execution Team.

### Iron Man:

One of Justin's hobbies is refinishing cast iron cookware. "I take very old, rough looking cookware and bring them back to new."

### The In-State Great Escape:

When it comes time for vacation, he likes to stay in New York state and visit the Adirondack region or the 1,000 Islands region.

## Noah Derohanian

**LEAD GROWER**  
PLEASANT VIEW GARDENS  
LOUDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

### Accomplishments:

- Manages the growing of company's young plants and finished products with a team of seven growers. Developed metrics geared toward understanding and reducing quality related losses.
- Responsible for managing the quality at company's contract growing locations in the Northeast, traveling often to New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts.
- Works diligently with his team to fine tune growing operations to ensure products are ready as needed, which helped increase in sell-through and reduce shrink.

### He's a Family Man:

Noah enjoys spending quality time with his family, playing his guitar and singing.

### A Few of His Faves:

Food: Pasta with sausage and meatballs.  
Vacation Spot: Cape Cod, Massachusetts.  
Movie: "Goodfellas" — "I watched it with my dad growing up."



## Cheryl DeVito

**CONTRACT GROW MANAGER**  
METROLINA GREENHOUSES  
HUNTERVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

### Accomplishments:

- Leads a team of dedicated buyers, planners and administrators who are delivering over \$100M in live goods coordinated between 58 growers across the country to deliver to Metrolina and then to retail outlets across the East Coast.
- At her previous employer, Cheryl worked in six different departments over a 10-year period and (with each move) was able to build a cohesiveness between teams and streamline operations.

### Dedicated & Committed:

One of Cheryl's proudest accomplishments is earning her MBA degree while managing a full-time career that involved traveling.

### Holiday Happiness:

When she was in college, Cheryl began to collect Christmas ornaments wherever she traveled "from small towns and large cities near and far" and one of her favorite movies is "White Christmas."

## Kevin Espiritu

**FOUNDER**  
EPIC GARDENING  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Dedicated to helping people grow anything to produce "a substantial amount of their own food at home and regain a sense of ownership, health and all-around life satisfaction simply by cultivating a garden."
- Published his first book, "Field Guide to Urban Gardening," to teach people how to be a gardener, not simply how to grow plants or use specific methods.



### A Gamble That Paid Off:

Kevin paid his way through college playing online poker, "which dissuaded me from following a more traditional career path, and eventually led to the path I'm on now with Epic Gardening."

### On His Bookshelf:

In his spare time, Kevin likes to read. Anything by Roald Dahl as well as the Redwall series from Brian Jacques are favorites.

## Nick Flax

**TECHNICAL SERVICES SPECIALIST**  
BALL SEED CO.  
WEST CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (REMOTELY BASED IN MARYLAND)

### Accomplishments:

- As an Extension educator at Penn State, Nick was part of a team that provided technical support, education and outreach for Pennsylvania growers including PSU's first-ever virtual Flower Trials Field Day.
- Member of tech services team that provides grower support through one-on-one discussions, in-person and virtual greenhouse visits, technical and grower training resources and social media.

### Road to Recovery:

Nick was wheelchair-bound for four months following a car accident. Now fully recovered, the "experience taught me how far I can push myself, to never take life for granted, never give up, and ... how truly lucky I am to have such an amazing wife, family and group of friends."

### A Thirst for Water Activities:

Nick enjoys scuba diving, swimming, kayaking and "pretty much anything that lets me enjoy the water."



## Lori Fry

**NURSERY AND PLANT COLLECTIONS MANAGER**  
TULSA BOTANIC GARDEN  
TULSA, OKLAHOMA

### Accomplishments:

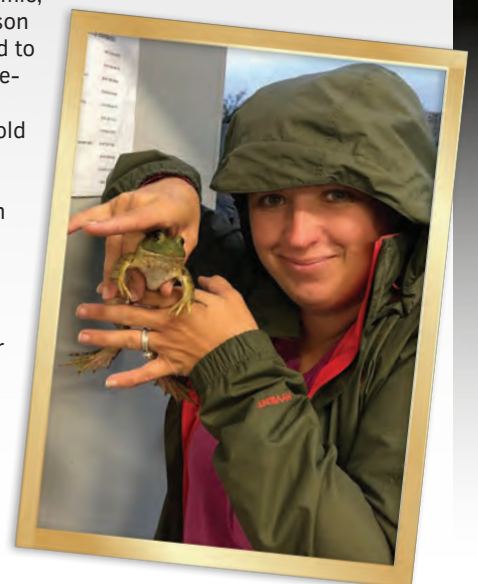
- Recipient of the Oklahoma Nursery and Landscape Association Green Industry Professional Award.
- Due to pandemic, TBG's in-person plant sale had to pivot to online-only sales format and sold more plants than ever as Lori's passion helped bring marketing, horticulture, and retail staff together to meet and exceed sales goals.

### One Quiet Hobby; One Not So Quiet:

When she's not working, Lori is an avid quilter and makes at least one quilt a month. She is also learning how to play the bagpipes.

### A Family Promise:

Last year, Lori wrote a book about her Great Uncle Bert. It was no easy undertaking since she knew very little about him but "when my grandmother was dying, she made me promise her that I would not forget her beloved brother."





# CONGRATULATIONS, DAN GILLESPIE!



**TRUE LEADERS  
BLEED BLUE**

Dan Gillespie is our Technical Team Lead. In his short two years with JR Peters, Dan has been key in providing our customers with ***new and improved Technical Support***.

We are very thankful for Dan and appreciate all of his hard work and innovative ideas he brings to our team every day. Dan is the epitome of Next Generational Technical Support in the horticulture industry. Need someone to karate kick a nutrient deficiency or toxicity?

Hit up Dan, our technical ninja!

**WE APPRECIATE  
YOU, DAN!**

—The JRP Blue Crew



**Starting a new project? Taking on a new crop?  
Thinking you're going to need a little help?**

That's what Dan and his team are here for—you and your plants. If your plants have problems, we have the answers. Reach out to Dan today! (And don't forget to congratulate him!)

**JR PETERS INC**

6656 Grant Way | Allentown, PA 18106  
866-522-5752 | [JRPeters.com](http://JRPeters.com)  
[JacksTech@JRPeters.com](mailto:JacksTech@JRPeters.com)





## Amy Gardner

PRODUCT MANAGER  
SYNGENTA FLOWERS  
GILROY, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Helped establish new product development process in the United States for a global breeding company based in Europe — including setting up and managing trial locations in Georgia, Florida and California. Two notable vinca series were developed as a result of her work.
- Was instrumental in developing the Vegetalis home garden vegetable assortment and selecting vegetable hybrids that performed for growers and consumers alike.

### Welcome to 2020, Asher!

Amy and her husband Jake welcomed their first son, Asher Jude, into the world in the summer of 2020.

### Outside of the Greenhouse:

During her downtime, Amy enjoys sailing, bee keeping, hiking and gardening (of course!). She also enjoys horseback riding. "Horseback riding was my first love and I used to train horses for a living."

## Dan Gillespie

TECHNICAL SPECIALIST  
J.R. PETERS  
ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

### Accomplishments:

- Member of the winning team of the Rooftop Garden Competition at the University of Arizona that proposed and designed an edible crop greenhouse that is in production on the roof of the UA Student Union to provide produce for underprivileged communities.
- Recipient of the Edward F. Hayes Graduate Research Forum for presenting his master's degree research at The Ohio State University.

### On His Dinner Table, Bookshelf and TV:

Dan's favorite food is any seafood; his favorite books are the Harry Potter series; and "Goodfellas" is his favorite movie. "I am a big fan of gangster movies."

### After Hours:

When he's not helping customers solve their plant nutrition problems, Dan's hobbies include growing plants, participating in sports, fishing, eating, exercising, reading, traveling and socializing with friends.



## Ryan Glover

OPERATIONS MANAGER  
GLOVER NURSERY  
WEST JORDAN, UTAH

### Accomplishments:

- Helped implement infrastructure improvements over the last five years, including building new retail buildings, cold frames for frost/winter protection and improved layout and signage throughout the nursery.
- A graduate of the University of Utah, takes great pride in continuing to learn and educate himself about the nursery industry. "I enjoy finding information from different sources and seeing how I can implement them in our business."

### What's for Dinner Tonight?

When it comes to mealtime, Ryan's favorite menu choice is "Anything that I cook on the grill at home."

### Check out His Passport:

Ryan likes to travel and has visited more than 40 different countries. His favorite vacation spot so far is Africa — "the wildlife was amazing and the people were great."

# GRIFFIN WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE



**George Grant**

GGSPRO Technical Specialist



**Kait Barry**

Retail Business Manager

On Becoming Members of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2021!



40 UNDER 40 // CLASS OF 2021

# GROWING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

*beyond all expectations*

*we're proud to serve you +*  
THE GREENHOUSE INDUSTRY

At Nufarm, we're improving facilities, increasing efficiency and expanding our solutions. The reasoning is simple: we know that excellence in our products and people results in excellence in your crop.

Thank you for your contribution and congratulations on your success.

*- the Nufarm team*

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 **Nufarm**  
Grow a better tomorrow



## George Grant

TECHNICAL SPECIALIST  
GRIFFIN GREENHOUSE SUPPLIES  
MORGANTOWN,  
PENNSYLVANIA

### Accomplishments:

- Assists growers throughout the U.S. by providing rapid, practical and accurate guidance on a wide variety of topics including insect and disease identification/management, biological controls, crop nutrition, PGRs and many others.
- Graduated with a bachelor's degree in Horticulture from the University of Georgia and a master's degree in Horticultural Sciences from the University of Florida where he graduated Summa Cum Laude.

### King of the Troop:

One of George's hidden talents is he can roar like a lion. "I discovered this while I was a Boy Scout. I am an Eagle Scout."

### The Gang's All Here:

Like fellow 40 Under 40 classmates Dan Gillespie and Noah Derohanian, "Goodfellas" is George's favorite movie. "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster."



## Esteban Herrera

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR  
BAILEY NURSERIES  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA (REMOTELY BASED  
IN OREGON)

### Accomplishments:

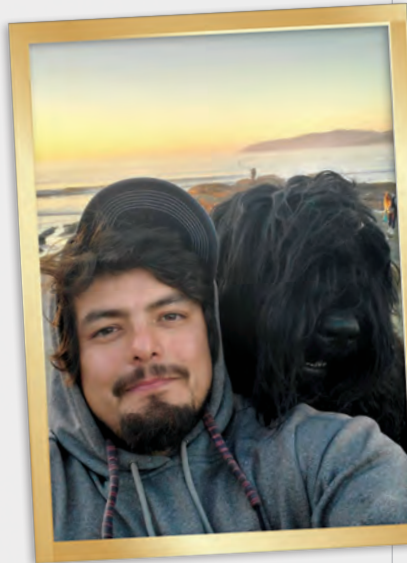
- Oversees bare root production and storage for one of the company's operations in Oregon. Played a key role in evaluating best cultural practices to ensure production of the highest quality bare root plants.
- Participates in many different facets of company's business and has led advances in technology to improve communication, reduce redundant data entry, and improve material handling and inventory management.

### Can't Live Without:

"Perseverance. Literally and figuratively I would not be alive without it."

### He's Got the Moves:

Esteban is "a very experienced YouTube dance choreography imitation enthusiast. I watch choreographed dance videos, slow down the speed to 25% and then learn the moves. Catch me during a karaoke session and it'll be on display."



## Ryan Hop

CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
WALTERS GARDENS  
ZEELAND, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- Leading a team that built "what I consider to be one of the best ERP systems available." It has allowed the company to make better decisions and work more efficiently.
- He is a graduate of the Executive Academy for Growth & Leadership (EAGL) with Charlie Hall. "This experience really helped me understand how to set direction and implement change to make our business better ... and connected me to an awesome network of supportive colleagues."

### Needs His Daily Jolt:

Ryan says he can't live without caffeine. "I despise coffee but cannot function with caffeine. White MONSTER is my favorite."

### Great Escape:

His favorite vacation spot is Michigan's Upper Peninsula. "It doesn't get a good cell signal, so the distractions of daily life aren't there."

## Liz Hughes

OWNER  
GROOVY PLANTS RANCH  
MARENGO, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Created and manages garden center's online store that over the past five years has "become so successful that we now have a small army to manage the orders and ... are shipping live plants to consumers in all 50 states!"
- Responsible for developing and presenting many different fun and educational programs and classes to IGC's loyal following.



### The Work of an Artist:

Liz has a master's degree in textile design and was an artist and art teacher before entering the horticulture world. Her artwork has been featured in international shows and she has appeared on a nationally syndicated quilting TV show.

### She Screams for Ice Cream:

"I love ice cream any time of the year! I don't even care what flavor, I just LOVE ice cream."

## Susan Judd

FRONT END MANAGER  
HEEMAN'S  
LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA

### Accomplishments:

- During the 2020 pandemic, Susan helped lead a team of 130 to safely and efficiently serve customers through IGC's busiest month of the year in a curbside environment, filling 725 daily orders during peak season.
- Worked as co-lead in the development of IGC's Hard Cider, which launched seven new flavors of hard cider and mead, while balancing her other business ventures and volunteer efforts.

### She's a Song & Dance Person:

Susan says she can't live without singing and dancing at work. "Staff sing-alongs and dance breaks always make the day better."

### She Enjoys a Different Kind of Day Off:

"Ferris Bueller's Day Off" starring Matthew Broderick is her favorite film. "It has some great life moments for people of all ages."



## Alex Kantor

OWNER/CEO  
PERFECT PLANTS NURSERY/LLOYD NURSERY  
LLOYD, FLORIDA

### Accomplishments:

- Conceived and founded Perfect Plants Nursery — an ecommerce plant nursery. "It all started with a dream about a three-pack of blueberries" and today sells over 200 different types of privacy trees, shrubs and fruiting plants.
- Also co-owns wholesale nursery with his sister and is continuing "our father's legacy of growing quality plants."

### The Xs and Os of Life:

"Game Plan for Life" by Joe Gibbs is his favorite book. "It inspired me to be a better person. He is a leader to young men in motivating how to live a successful life."

### The Beach Is Calling:

"St. Pete Beach is my favorite vacation spot because my wife and I enjoy fun in the sun near the ocean any chance we can get."



40  
UNDER  
40



## CONGRATULATIONS, MAX!

We couldn't be more proud of your selection to the 40 under 40 class, and it reflects the leadership and impact that you bring to Cresco Labs everyday.

CRESCOLABS®



**Justin Keeler**

GENERAL MANAGER  
EVERDE GROWERS  
HOUSTON, TEXAS

**Accomplishments:**

- Manages two of the company's nurseries with a combined total of 1,200 acres, and 500 employees during peak season and helped create a new culture that fosters teamwork and puts the whole team's success above individual successes.
- Implemented a strategic field layout plan that grouped like crops together to help company be more efficient on best growing practices.

**Scout's Honor:**

Like fellow 40 Under 40 classmate George Grant, Justin is an Eagle Scout, the highest rank attainable in the Boy Scouts of America.

**After Work:**

Justin's hobbies include hunting, fishing, gaming and watching sports, and his favorite food is the mango habanero wings from Buffalo Wild Wings. When it comes to movies, his flick to click is "Remember the Titans."

**Melinda Knuth**

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATE  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
HOMESTEAD, FLORIDA

**Accomplishments:**

- Earned her Ph.D. from Texas A&M and collaborated on multiple publications including the "Change and Disruption in the Floral Industry" reports and the Update on the Benefits of Plants literature series.
- Currently a member of the AmericanHort's Generation Next Community Connector group and participated in the HortScholar as a student in 2017.

**During Her Downtime:**

Melinda enjoys crocheting, listening to true crime podcasts, weightlifting, homebrewing beer and reading historical fiction. "Developing stories based on real life events or people makes the context incredibly tangible and personal."

**What's in a Name?**

The origin of her family name, Knuth, is linked with Knut the Great, one of the kings of Northern Europe during the Roman Empire era. "You could extrapolate that I'm of distant royal lineage."

**Lauren Kirchner**

DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING  
SPRING CREEK GROWERS  
WALLER, TEXAS

**Accomplishments:**

- Responsible for designing programs and marketing initiatives for large grocery chains and IGCs, including the creation of marketing packages with signage, tags and custom pots/containers.
- Creates plant shopping experiences that are fun and spark creative joy in consumer spaces — "something sexy, clever, romantic, funny or fun."

**Hidden Talent:**

Lauren loves music and can memorize a song really quickly. "If I hear it two or three times, I can probably sing it back, but NEVER in front of people, though!"

**Backyard Lab:**

Her backyard is an experimental cut flower garden. "My sons' teachers get lots of little holiday bouquets and 'just because' batches. It has been a beautiful little hobby with the kids and creative playground for me."

# Congratulations, Justin!



We are proud to have you as a member of the Everde Growers family. Thank you for your hard work and steadfast dedication through these past years. We're looking forward to a bright future with you!







**Forty**  
under **40**

**ESTEBAN HERRERA**

Bailey Nurseries Production Manager, West Coast.  
Master Fisherman and Awesome Human Being.

# CONGRATULATIONS ESTEBAN!

You bring great drive, ideas, and enthusiasm to the nursery and to life each day. You show commitment to the business and our people while not taking yourself too seriously.

You are a great representative of the future of this industry. Thank you for your leadership and for being a key part of our success!





## Andrew Konicki

TROPICAL SALES DIRECTOR  
DÜMMEN ORANGE  
COLUMBUS, OHIO

### Accomplishments:

- Developed a business plan and helped strategize the creation and implementation of the company's tropical plant division — Dümmen Orange Delta.
- Draws inspiration and passion from the many different people throughout this industry who are generous with their time and knowledge and have helped him be successful.

### A Few of His Faves:

Andrew's top menu pick is sushi. His go-to snack is peanut butter cups. He and his wife enjoy traveling, but it has to be somewhere new each time. "I don't like to repeat destinations."

### A Fish Story:

"The Big Fish" is his favorite film. "Storytelling is one of the most fascinating things about people, the movie captures it perfectly."

## Judson LeCompte

ASSISTANT MANAGER OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT  
SPRING MEADOW NURSERY  
GRAND HAVEN, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- Assists in the development of woody and perennial cultivars for release by national brands and uses his academic and industry experience to introduce new ideas and strategies to strengthen nursery operation.
- While earning his Ph.D., he studied *Camellia sinensis* tea, as an alternative crop for the Southern U.S. to provide producers the knowledge to grow and process tea.

### Favorite Philosopher:

"I subscribe to the gospel of Dolly Parton. Like she says, 'Smile, it increases your face value!'"

### Who Are You?

His grandfather was born into a sharecropping family and his father is a retired chemist for an agriculture lab. "Now, I get to discover and develop genetics to help support farming families around the world. Dolly again: 'Find out who you are, and do it on purpose.'"



## Jill Mullaney

OWNER/ACCOUNT MANAGER  
PLATINUM PETALS/HALLECK HORTICULTURAL LLC  
DALLAS, TEXAS

### Accomplishments:

- Received industry grower of the year award for her role as a young botanic garden grower at the Dallas Arboretum.
- Successfully persevered through the pandemic operating her boutique wedding floral design company. Company was named Best of Weddings Pick in Dallas and 2020 Couples' Choice Award by Wedding Wire.

### Always Got it:

ChapStick. "I've definitely found out in the past year that I can live without many things ... but, probably ChapStick. I'm never without some in my purse, pocket, car."

### She Can Name That Tune:

"I have a crazy memory for remembering song lyrics — any era and genre. 'I can't remember what I did yesterday, but my brain stores this info like a vault! I'm made for the 'Name That Tune' show."



## Laura Masor

PLANT BREEDER  
BALL FLORAPLANT  
ARROYO GRANDE, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Continues to innovate and improve in the crop classes that she breeds and manages, which include calibrachoa, verbena, angelonia and coleus.
- Conceptualized and developed the Cha-Cha series of calibrachoa in less than four years.
- Earned her master's degree and Ph.D. from Texas A&M in less than six years.

### She's a Catwoman:

Laura can't live without her cats. "I have one sweet giant black kitty named Sambuca and a pair of youngsters, Big Tex and Crawdad, that I got through fostering for the local animal shelter this summer. They have definitely kept me sane and entertained through quarantine."

### On Her Download List:

"I love podcasts and listen to them all day. My favorites are My Favorite Murder, Armchair Expert, Science Friday, Fresh Air and Planet Money."

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# Forty under 40

## Congratulations, Karin!

Karin has been leaving her mark on Walters Gardens as a part of the third generation leadership and in her official role as Vice President of Product Strategy. We are thrilled to see her hard work and dedication recognized with this award, it is well deserved!



## Michelle Opela

IPM MANAGER  
COSTA FARMS  
LEICESTER, NORTH CAROLINA

### Accomplishments:

- Responsible for developing a biological integrated pest management program to reduce company's chemical input and increase the use of beneficials.
- As technical support manager, helped grow the company's young plant division and developed technical support material.



### Not Only Does She Grow Plants at Work:

"When I get home from working with plants I hop into taking care of my 400+ plants and I love every bit of it."

### A Regional Delicacy:

Michelle's favorite food is the pork belly and watermelon taco at White Duck Tacos. "If you ever find yourself in Asheville, North Carolina, this is a must try!"

### An Appropriate Childhood Nickname:

"My nickname growing up was 'Bug' and now I work with bugs!"

## Kit Leider Pierri

GARDEN CENTER MANAGER/COMMUNICATIONS  
DIRECTOR  
LEIDER GREENHOUSES  
BUFFALO GROVE, ILLINOIS

### Accomplishments:

- Transitioned garden center from an outdated cash register system to a fully digital POS system that allows the company to generate reports and data to better plan for the upcoming seasons.
- Oversaw the process of completely revamping company's production planning software.

### Family Biz:

Kit is the fifth generation of her family to work in the business that was started in 1898. She also has an identical twin sister.

### There's Always Housework to Do:

Kit and her husband recently celebrated their one-year homeowner anniversary. "I love working on home projects and (slowly) decorating the place room by room."

### You Won't Find This Info on IMDB:

Part of the movie "Omen 2" was filmed in the Leider family greenhouse in 1978!



## Adalice Powers

TRIAL MANAGER  
ERNST BENARY OF AMERICA  
WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA

### Accomplishments:

- Developed trial department and trial program, work structure and improvement in production techniques.
- Also developed varieties performance evaluation techniques, comparison trials, garden and containers display during California Spring Trials.

### Tuned In:

As a teenager, Adalice was the host of a local radio show. "My father used to say that my talent is to be a journalist."

### On Her Bookshelf:

"The Spiritual Wisdom of Anthony de Mello" is her favorite read. "The book is a wonderful call to reflect on spirituality."

### Destination South America:

Paraguay is her preferred vacation spot to visit family, relatives and friends. While she's there, she loves to eat Paraguayan barbecue with green salad. "Paraguay is an incredibly hospitable country."

# CONGRATULATIONS!

## Forty under 40

**Congratulations to  
Laura and Nick**  
on your selection as members of  
**40 Under 40, Class of 2021!**

Thanks for helping  
Ball Horticultural Company  
deliver on our promise of  
**"All the Best and Nothing Else."**

Ball®



**LAURA MASOR**  
Plant Breeder

Laura is responsible for some of Ball FloraPlant's most exciting introductions over the last several years. Her expertise in calibrachoa and verbena breeding, as well as other crops, has made a huge impact on the overall portfolio of Ball FloraPlant genetics. She brings innovation to the marketplace every year with new varieties that are both unique and provide solutions for the grower and the consumer.



**NICK FLAX**  
Technical Services  
Specialist

Nick brings diverse experience to the technical services team based on his undergraduate and graduate studies at Iowa State University, greenhouse experience from propagation to finished production and his previous work with Penn State University Extension. Nick delivers technical support in a knowledgeable and approachable way - from one-on-one interaction to video presentations and multimedia education. He's a greenhouse production jack-of-all-trades, taking technical and customer service into the next generation.

Ball FloraPlant®

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# HERE COMES THE SUN.

## Congratulations, Dr. Judson LeCompte!

As Assistant Manager of Product Development, Dr. LeCompte is helping Spring Meadow Nursery turn over a new leaf, bringing his expertise in woody ornamentals for warm climates to our West Michigan nursery. His knowledge, skill, and sunny disposition exemplify the name Proven Winners®.

We couldn't be prouder that Judson is representing Spring Meadow in this year's 40 Under 40 class.





## Rizaniño "Riz" Reyes

OWNER  
RHR HORTICULTURE  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

### Accomplishments:

- Recipient of a gold medal and the Founder's Cup for Best Show Garden at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show in Seattle, Washington.
- Received Emerging Horticultural Professional Award from the American Horticultural Society.

### Dance Fever:

While studying for a career in horticulture in his native Philippines, Riz also studied dance in college and even auditioned to be on "American Idol."

### An Artistic Redemption:

One of Riz's favorite movies is "The Shawshank Redemption" because of the "brilliant acting and a great story." One of his favorite books is "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron. "It was a textbook for one of my dance classes in college and taught me principles that also related to my work in horticulture and landscape design."



## Jon Russell

GROWER MANAGER  
MONROVIA  
GRANBY, CONNECTICUT

### Accomplishments:

- Striving for continuous improvement, he helped standardize growing operations of nursery including such things as soils, fertilization, schedules, environmental conditions and plant spacing — while balancing the art of growing with a data-driven approach.
- Helped develop nursery's Ericaceous plant program through a series of soil trials and crop schedule tweaking, to increase inventory turns, reduce scrap and improve overall health.

### Off the Clock:

In his spare time, Jon enjoys oil painting, carpentry, home improvement projects (especially remodeling and landscaping) and playing basketball.

### Life Lessons Learned:

Jon's father was a dairy farmer. "I joke that I got into horticulture because livestock are too frustrating to work with. I learned my work ethic by working on dairy farms. I give a lot of credit to the experiences I had and to the lessons I learned from the people I worked with."

## Debalina Saha

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- After earning her Ph.D. from University of Florida, Debalina joined Michigan State University as tenure track assistant professor with three-way appointment in research, teaching and extension.
- Established an applied research program at MSU focusing on weed management for ornamental crop production and Christmas tree production to help growers improve their productivity.

### Different Strokes

A trained swimmer and a painter, Debalina has been painting for more than 13 years and paints with watercolors, charcoal, pastels, and pencil sketches.

### What's for Dinner?

Her favorite Indian dish is Chicken Biryani. "This dish is made of long-grain Basmati rice flavored with different spices such as saffron, cloves, cinnamon, etc., which is cooked with big chunks of chicken pieces. I like the flavor and aroma."



# Forty under 40 Congratulations, Adalice!



Thank you for your dedication,  
hard work and creativity!





## Maxwell Salinger

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CULTIVATION  
CRESCO LABS  
LINCOLN, ILLINOIS

### Accomplishments:

- Worked with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to develop and refine an organic certification program for cannabis, the first of its kind for cannabis production in the United States.
- Executed a 180,000 square-foot canopy expansion to become Illinois' largest cannabis production site; including the onboarding of 190 cultivation team members.

### Ride on!

Max used to competitively race bicycles and was the Ohio State criterium champion in 2015.

### Following in Mom's Footsteps (kind of):

Max's mom moved from England to the United States to complete an internship at the Cleveland Botanical Garden. "Almost 20 years later I completed the same internship at the same botanical garden; and my supervisor was my mom's intern while she worked at the Holden Arboretum!"

## Sean Sangster

PROJECT MANAGER, HORTICULTURE SERVICES  
FLUENCE BY OSRAM  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

### Accomplishments:

- Helps growers understand the basics of photobiology and how key lighting strategies can help improve their commercial production systems.
- A former head grower for a large ornamental producer, he oversaw the propagation of seeds and unrooted cuttings for more than 150 different genuses and developed proper cultural practices to optimize the genetic potential of new cultivars.

### He Continues to Play:

In middle school Sean learned how to play the trombone "and have held on to this skill set throughout my adult life."

### After Hours:

When not working, Sean enjoys going for a run, playing basketball and reading books about plants — a favorite is "Plant Empowerment" because it "brings the science of growing plants and physics together to show a new perspective on greenhouse plant production."



## Karin Walters

VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT STRATEGY  
WALTERS GARDENS  
ZEELAND, MICHIGAN

### Accomplishments:

- Instrumental in taking company's active perennial breeding program and working through all of the steps for bringing those genetic introductions to the market.
- Along with fellow honoree and co-worker Ryan Hop, Karin graduated from Charlie Hall's Executive Academy for Growth & Leadership during the pandemic.

### Bring on the Books:

Karin is a voracious reader and typically reads 100 books a year — 2020 was a record year for her reading 144 books! "I can probably live without my Kindle, but I'd prefer not to."

### Vacay Getaway:

"I like to explore new places that I've never been to before. As for repeat vacations within driving distance, nothing can beat Ludington State Park or Sleeping Bear Dunes in West Michigan." *gpn*

**Forty**  
under **40** Celebrating the next  
generation of horticulture

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