

A LESSON IN LEARNING



An internship can teach students more than how to stick cuttings, irrigate and load trucks.

BY CARRIE BURNS

Before starting a new project — one that you've never done before — isn't it nice to have a little background information or maybe even some experience in a segment of the project? Of course it is, and that is just what happened in the case of this year's GPN/Nexus Intern Of the Year scholarship winner. This year's winner was chosen by a select group of judges who seemed to have a pretty difficult time, as there were numerous qualified applicants, but it was clear that the judges made a good decision when I called the greenhouse where she worked. Everyone I talked to told me what a great job she did and what a wonderful person she is, even without me having to ask.

Much like many people in the industry, University of Florida student, Jessica Boldt, just about grew up in a greenhouse. Jessica's mom and dad own a small nursery, South Brevard Nursery, in Melbourne, Fla., that is about 2 acres in size and has transitioned into more of a retail operation. "Growing up I would help with the production in the greenhouse and help on the retail end with the customers," Boldt said. Jessica was not the only Boldt helper at the family nursery; she has a twin sister Jennifer, who also attends University of Florida and completed an internship this past summer/fall at Van Wingerden International, Fletcher, N.C., and ended up third in the race for our award. Love of horticulture must run thick in the Boldt blood, and it carried on with Jessica. "I've grown up around plants my entire life, working with them all the time," Boldt said. "I just knew that it was something I wanted to continue doing. It's a love for me."

"I've known Jessica for a long time," said Jim Barrett, professor at University of Florida. "She's been coming to our poinsettia field trials since she was in about sixth grade. It's been great to see her mature and grow." ♦



GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year 2004: Jessica Boldt. (Photo courtesy of Eric Robinson)

intern of the year

So, when it came time for college Boldt decided to continue her education at the University of Florida. "University of Florida has one of the best horticulture programs in the United States," Boldt said. "And it was also in state, so it was close to family." While at the University of Florida, Boldt was assigned an academic adviser and then signed up for a class with Barrett. "I had Dr. Barrett as a professor

last fall (2003), and he knew my love of plants and my background," Boldt said. "He recommended that I apply for my internship, helped facilitate setting up my internship and has been my adviser while I've been on my internship."

When deciding on the place, Boldt considered Barrett's presence in the industry and the ability to work his contacts. "I told him (Barrett) that I was looking for an operation

that was not in Florida, produced greenhouse crops and was a larger-scale operation," Boldt said. "He looked into different contacts and told me 'I could send you to California, but now is not the right time; I could send you to Canada, but since that is international we would have some [legal] issues; I think the best fit for you right now would be White's [Nursery & Greenhouses].'" ♦

Jessica's Essay

To determine the 2004 GPN/Nexus Intern Scholarship winner, we evaluated candidates on the quality of their experience, knowledge gained and the applicant's ability to describe the internship, including how it impacted their education and career path. The following is an excerpt from Jessica Boldt's winning essay:

The next challenge presented to me came from Bob Bailey, the head grower and greenhouse manager. He brought out crates of L.A. Hybrid lily bulbs and said, "I need these planted, and I need you to be in charge." I quickly responded, "But Bob, I've never planted lilies before." That did not stop him from giving me this learning experience! He demonstrated the proper way to plant the bulbs and provided me with the supplies I would need, and then he left me to sink or swim. I quickly made up my mind that I would take his challenge and succeed. With my limited Spanish, I explained to the workers how to plant the bulbs correctly, which bench to put the pots on and where to find the supplies they needed. By the end of the day, I was amazed at how I could take charge in a situation to accomplish a given task, yet not come across as a dictator. The Spanish-speaking workers who worked with me adopted me as one of their own, yet respected my role as supervisor. From then on, Bob designated me as the supervisor of lily planting. I believe that Bob knew my capabilities before I did and used

this experience to teach me an invaluable lesson about myself. I can do anything I put my mind to as long as I believe in myself.

My internship rotation ended in the harvesting and shipping department. During my first day there, Carrie Smith, the head of the department, assigned me a special task. I was to be the coordinator for all the local delivery orders and responsible for making sure all plants were accounted for and packaged correctly. I quickly learned the difference between a local order and a box order, what UPC to use and where to place it, what pot cover to use and which sleeves to use on certain plants. She also showed me how to process the box orders and how to organize the workers in the packing area. I was quickly tested when the coordinator of the packing area did not show up one day, and I was left in charge! I relied on the skills I learned throughout this internship experience, and all plants were shipped out successfully in an organized manner.



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"I thought White's would be best for her since she's from a small nursery that does potted plants," Barret said. "I thought she needed some experience in large potted production."

THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

So, Boldt was off to Chesapeake, Va., in June 2004 to complete a six-month internship. Starting a new job is always nerve-racking, but for Boldt this was a new experience in many ways. "This was my first time being away from home for an extended period of time on my own and working for someone besides my parents. The nursery was my only job through high

school," Boldt said. "So I walked in the first day, and they asked me to fill out an application for employment. I thought, 'Okay I can do that,' and then they introduced me to my first supervisor, and she made me feel right at home. I just knew that it would be a nice fit for me."

One thing Boldt did not have to be too nervous about was being the only intern. She was the only American intern at the time; there were 3-4 other interns from foreign countries, but communication between everyone at White's was positive.

Communicating with the Spanish-speaking workers at White's was another learning experience for Boldt. "One thing that surprised me was how fast Spanish comes back to you if you've forgotten it," she said. "I had four years [of Spanish classes] in high school and one semester in college, but then there were two and a half years where I didn't speak a word of it. The Spanish-speaking workers were very welcoming, and if you attempt to learn the language they love to teach you. So by the time I left we were having conversations."

Another aspect of Boldt's internship that surprised her was how much responsibility she held as an intern. "I would go in the morning and Bob Bailey, the head grower,

would say, 'Jessica, today we're doing lilies, and you're going to be in charge. There are your bulbs; there are your pots; there is your soil; there are your workers; make sure it gets completed,'" Boldt said.

"I had her plant bulbs one time and she did it right and counted right so I gave her more, because I knew she could handle it," Bailey said. But he didn't leave her out to dry. "He said to make sure I supervise [the other workers] and to make sure [the lilies] got planted correctly. He told me to walk alongside the benches, set the lilies down on the bench, call someone to get them watered in and take the count for inventory, and then he told me, 'if you need something this is my phone number.'"

FIRST JOBS

I'll bet many of you reading this are wondering if Boldt has been snatched up yet. Well, the answer is no. But it won't take long. "I'd hire her tomorrow if I could," Dailey said. But, Boldt hasn't decided yet whether she would like to continue with her studies after she graduates in December 2005 or begin working. "Right now my idea is to go out into the job field," Boldt said.

Another benefit to an internship is to find out what you want. "Right now, White's might be a little on the large end for me. I think I may look for a smaller operation to start out with," Boldt said. "But, I do know that I want to be a greenhouse production manager."

After Boldt's experience and as a soon-to-be college graduate, she thinks most college



Boldt (right) got along well with the other employees at White's.



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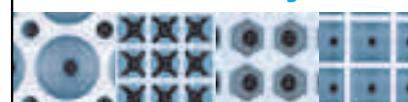
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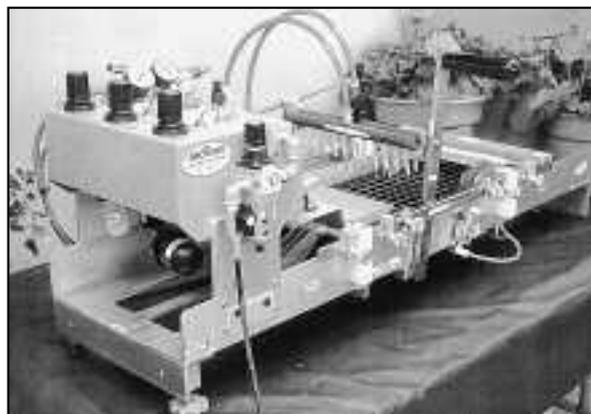


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graduates will be looking for a starting place. "I think they will be looking for a place where they can improve the skills they learned in college and a place where they have room to move up to management," Boldt said. "They shouldn't be afraid to start out towards the bottom, knowing they have the opportunity to advance."

IS IT WORTH IT?

"The experience [of an internship] is priceless because the classes you have at a university are more about concepts and what you can do with them and how you can apply them," Boldt emphasized. "It's very important to have an internship where you can apply those concepts and see how they work in certain situations and not others. It's just the best learning opportunity you can have because they expect you to make mistakes and expect you to ask questions like why they're doing things and if those things are actually working."

So, any advice from an experienced intern? "Make time for a 6-month internship, because when you have six months you don't just get to see one crop go through the greenhouse, you get to see multiple crops [turn] and the planning involved with keeping the crops separate and how they rotate through the space," Boldt suggested. "Summer internships are great because you don't have to take time off from school, but I feel that a 6-month internship is much more rewarding. You get an extended period in each rotation so you get to learn more in-depth not just an overview."

From an employer's perspective, Bailey expressed how important it is for an intern to come in willing to learn. "They don't need to know everything when they get here," he said. "Start at the bottom and learn."

Boldt also has a suggestion for companies looking for interns. "Be

Runner-Up

GPN and Nexus would like to recognize Joseph Jenkins, who is obtaining his degree from Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, as runner-up for the 2004 Intern of the Year Scholarship, which carries a cash reward of \$500. Jenkins completed an internship at DeJong Greenhouses, Pella, Iowa, this past summer.

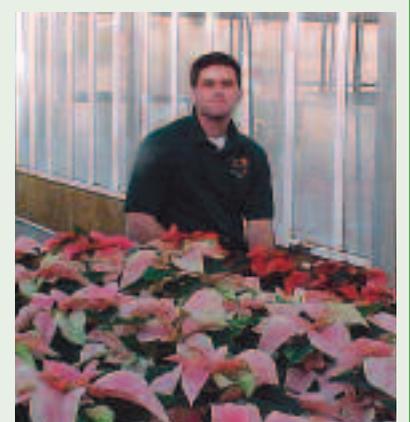


Photo courtesy of Barb Osborn

Jenkins began his quest for his degree at Iowa State in 2003 after a year at Des Moines Area Community College, and according to Barb Osborn, program director in the Department of Horticulture at Iowa State, he "hit the ground running, becoming involved in the horticulture club and departmental activities right away."

At DeJong, Jenkins learned many things such as PGR applications on crops to prevent stretching, the effect of shrink on a business, how weather affects our industry, planning and scheduling importance, the beginning of poinsettia production and other things to use in his future career.

Even though all of these lessons impressed Jenkins, he spoke most highly of another experience. "Finally, after weeks of fixing neglected water lines and the like, I received an exciting and ambitious project," Jenkins wrote in his essay. "I would attend the OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio." He went on to express how much he learned in just a few days attending the tours, sitting in on seminars and networking with new and old colleagues. "Upon returning to work, I was invited to participate in a few plant selection meetings where my opinions/evaluations of several of the new plant varieties that I had seen at the Short Course were welcomed and taken into consideration."

Jenkins put his experience into words quite nicely to conclude his essay. "While what I have recounted represents some of the mere extremes of my internship experience, I believe it is at these extremes where the best lessons are learned and the most knowledge is gained." Good luck Joe!

willing to set aside time each week to discuss their progress. Be willing to set aside a block of time, say an extra ½ hour for lunch and make it a lunch meeting or something like that when they can discuss what's been going on, what they're getting out of it and what they can hope to continue to get out of it."

You've heard it before, so let's make this short and sweet just to remind you: Internships are a win-

win situation. The intern gets a priceless and extraordinary learning experience they will most likely use forever. The greenhouse gets some extra help and a possible future employee, and it con-

tributes to this amazing industry where help, advice and friends are just around the corner. **GPN**

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