

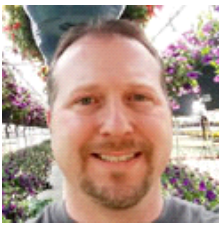
GROWERTALKS

Features

5/27/2016

Where Are They Now?

Allison Westbrook



Dana Langhoff

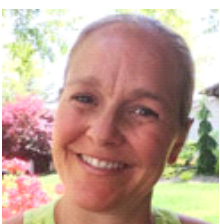
2010 Young Grower Winner

Dana has been working for Natural Beauty of Wisconsin for 20 years now—the same company he worked for at the time of the award. However, in 2015, he was promoted from Young Plant Grower Manager to Range Manager. This role entails working alongside his fellow supervisors and managers in order to provide a constant flow of communication and tools to help these leaders manage the employees effectively and efficiently. Dana likes this approach.

“I find that it’s a lot easier to feel the pulse of the facility and also gain perspective if I can work in the greenhouse among the employees instead of sitting in an office,” he explained. He says that although the award hasn’t changed the trajectory of his career all that much, he has met some amazing people and gained new friends (like our own Jen Zurko) through the experience. It has also opened the door for him to use his love of writing to write for GrowerTalks! He says, “For me, the experience was more personal than professional.”

Dana’s advice for our Young Grower finalists is this: “You should feel enormous pride in the fact that you were selected from a very talented group of young leaders in the horticulture industry. Use this experience as a catalyst to make great things happen for you. You don’t have to be the winner to be a winner. Opportunities like this don’t come along too often, so make the most of it.”

What is Dana most excited about in the world of horticulture? Technology in the industry. He says, “As labor is getting harder and harder to find nowadays, integrating robots that space plants or robots that can stick vegetative cuttings on a line are going to be necessary to fill in labor gaps.”



Chris Campbell

2008 Young Retailer Winner

For Chris, much has changed since winning the Young Retailer Award. Although she loved carrying on the fourth generation at her family’s nursery, she left Campbell’s in 2012 to pursue the dream of owning her own business. She now owns and operates a company

called Container Creation, which she describes as, “A four-season container business that allows me to still get my fingers dirty and be creative, but with the flexibility to travel with my husband, raise a family, be involved in the community and spend summers with my family at the cabin in Northern Minnesota.”

On a more personal side, she was married in 2011 to husband Derrick Eells and in 2015, they welcomed a son, Brooks Michael Eells.

Although her place of work has changed, her passion for the industry has not. She still loves to leaf through industry magazines, giving her dad input on what to grow next season. While she misses helping customers and the excitement of spring in a garden center, she doesn't miss the long hours. She enjoys watching the industry evolve, and seeing new varieties and innovations.

Her advice for Young Retailers is, “Follow your dreams! As scary as it is to come to the decision that you want to ‘jump’ ... it was the best thing I ever did!”



Zoltan Kovacs

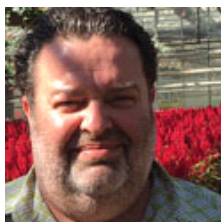
2008 Young Grower Winner

Zoltan has been on the move since earning the Young Grower Award in 2008, while working for Sunny Border Nursery. Shortly after winning the award, he moved to Michael's Greenhouses in Cheshire, Connecticut, where he worked with perennials for big box

stores.

However, he knew he wanted to work with plant genetics, and when Dümmen came calling, he jumped at the chance to join their team. He's now their Perennial Product Manager for North America and Canada. He calls this his “dream job,” as it enables to him to travel, meet people in the industry, and always be learning and improving. He focuses on Dümmen's own perennial breeding and getting their genetics to market. He also uses his experience to consult with growers on tech support and production.

We asked him what excited him in the world of horticulture and he replied, “I'm excited about the future of the industry. Millennials are not coming into the industry in large numbers and this is allowing for multiple opportunities for people of my generation. However, this is not so good in the long-term. Education and outreach may be a good way to solve this problem.”



Noah Schwartz

2006 Young Grower Winner

After receiving the Young Grower Award, Noah returned to Matterhorn Nursery with a renewed excitement for the industry and its growth. He contacted Doug Cole (owner of D.S. Cole Growers and the then-president of OFA) and asked him how he could be involved and give back to the horticulture industry. On Doug's advice, Noah joined Generation Next, and after serving two years, he was selected to join OFA's Board of Directors. In that role, he contributed to the re-branding of OFA and formation of AmericanHort.

After 17 years at Matterhorn Nursery, he was recruited by a large grower in New Jersey to be the Director of Production and Head Grower. This involved overseeing all growing, production and program planning. He says, "This was quite a jump from a 50,000-sq. ft. grower/retailer to leading a team that grew in 37 acres of greenhouses and as much as 150 acres of outside growing."

After a few years there, he relocated to Michigan to work for Neal Mast Greenhouse, where he is currently the Director of Growing. He enjoys his work at Neal Mast, saying, "Neal Mast Greenhouse is a very exciting company that holds very high core values and is a leader in growing a sustainable business from seed to shelf."

Regarding the award and its impact on his career, he says that he's been fortunate to work with some of the best growers and consultants in the industry. He still stays in contact with many Young Grower Award winners and candidates. He has also had the honor of being on several retail advisory committees and traveling to meet with many breeders and stock farms in Europe and South America.

His advice to Young Grower Award candidates? "Enjoy the process, and if awarded, work hard to prove it. Stay loyal to your employer, as without them, the nomination would not be possible."



Mike Merida

2009 Young Grower Winner

Since receiving the Young Grower Award, Mike has moved up the ranks at Costa Farms. Most recently, he succeeded his mentor Rene Cairo (who he mentioned in our September 2009 profile of Mike in GrowerTalks) as the Production Manager for the Foliage Division of Costa Farms.

In addition, Mike now has a seat on Costa's new product development team where he participates very closely with Mike Rimland, their in-house Research and Development Director. He was also very proud to have been invited to be an active board member for the University of Florida Tropical Research and Education Center. Regarding his achievements at Costa Farms, he adds, "I was also very fortunate to be selected by Costa Farms to participate in the first class of Six Sigma Greenbelts."

Not all of Mike's milestones have been in his career. He says, "The most important life changing blessing was the gift of my two daughters [ages 2 and 4]."

Mike's enthusiasm for the industry is apparent as he emphasizes his desire to always be learning in the areas of production and operational excellence. The phrase that he lives by was originated by Costa CEO Joche Smith: "Stay Humble, Stay Hungry and Hustle."

Mike is excited to see the ongoing development of new varieties and trends in horticulture. "Our industry is very dynamic and issues always arise, which enable us to evolve. Challenges with our labor force, neonicotinoids and profit margins lead us to think outside the box in order to streamline our operations and become an efficient enterprise."

His advice for other young growers is to continue to sharpen your skills. “As a grower, as a person, as a team player, as an open-minded individual, as an effective communicator and as a steward to our industry.” **GT**