MNLGA 2022 Scholarship Recipients

In keeping with its mission to promote and provide for the future success of Maryland’s ornamental horticulture industry, the Maryland Nursery, Landscape, and Greenhouse Association shall sponsor academic scholarships to students pursuing an education in the field of landscape/ornamental horticulture. The 2022 applicant pool all shared their passion for horticulture specifically in landscape design/architecture, and their excitement to enter a career in the horticulture industry was abundantly expressed in their applications. We congratulate our 2022 scholarship recipients: Kelly Lawhorn, Kaila Blevins, and Kayla Goldstein. We would also like to congratulate 2022 Link Shanks award winner Madeleine Tilley.

Kelly Lawhorn

Ever since she was a child, she has been drawn to outdoor spaces. Whether she was shadowing her next-door neighbor in his vegetable garden all summer or exercising her sizeable imagination running under her weeping willow tree, she always wanted to be outside. Her love for the outdoors and landscapes only grew as she got older and was given the freedom to plan and maintain her family’s home gardens.

She entered her undergraduate studies with optimism, ready to make the world a better place. Kelly majored in Environmental Studies at University of Maryland, Baltimore County where she learned to think globally, but act locally. During her senior year of undergraduate studies, one of her professors could see how overwhelmed she and her classmates were prior to graduation, with so many environmental challenges out in the world to confront. Her professor’s parting words to Kelly and her classmates were to “find a cause that is important to you, in your own backyard, and act on that.”

These words stuck with her as she entered the environmental job search 10 years ago, where she ultimately ended up working with an AmeriCorps program, Volunteer Maryland. This program placed her with a small non-profit organization, Monarch Sister Schools Program, dedicated to thinking globally and acting locally. Their main goal was to restore habitat for the monarch butterfly by designing and installing outdoor classrooms for local school aged children. On top of that she also connected with students in Mexico who lived within the monarch butterfly biosphere reserve. Though these groups of students were thousands of miles apart they were all dedicated to the same goal of restoring habitat. This experience was instrumental in moving her to her current position as Nursery Manager at Chesapeake Natives, Inc., a nonprofit native plant nursery operating out of a historic greenhouse in Rosaryville State Park, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

At Chesapeake Natives, Kelly is responsible for daily operations at the nursery, leading a team of volunteers to execute the company’s mission of promoting, protecting, and propagating plants native to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. She works closely with clients to design native pollinator habitats for backyards, schools, and local parks and has seen first-hand the benefits they bring to the community. She has gained experience designing gardens for all types of scenarios, full sun habitat gardens in schoolyards, meadows in state parks, stormwater management systems and rain gardens for homeowners.

While running the nursery full time she is also pursuing a graduate degree in Landscape Architecture at Morgan State University, so that she can continue to cultivate the skills she has learned over the last 9 years working in the non-profit environmental space. She is eager to gain more knowledge in design so she can better help people...
restore native landscapes in their own backyards. Making nature more accessible, inclusive, and inviting for everyone is important to Kelly. She is confident that with the help of the talented professors at Morgan State University, she can achieve this goal in her future work within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This scholarship would help alleviate some of the financial stress of graduate school and allow her to cut back some hours at work so that she can continue to fully devote herself to expanding her knowledge of landscape architecture.

Kaila Blevins

Kaila is currently entering her third and final year in the Master of Landscape Architecture Program at the Morgan State University in Baltimore. During her time in the program, she enjoys learning about the complexities of the built environment including grading, site inventorying, and understanding plants and their needs. While it may not be fair to select a favorite piece of the design process, plant selection takes the cake! And that is what brought her to this field.

During her final year working on her Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science at University of Maryland, College Park, she interned at the National Arboretum and enrolled in Wetland Design class. Her internship exposed her to the world of public gardens and the plant world overall, but she wasn’t sure how she could marry her plant love to her future career. That is until her professor invited a guest lecturer, a landscape architect who designs wetlands. Kaila was immediately enthralled. After leaving, she began researching landscape architecture and made an appointment with the school’s career counselor on how to apply to graduate programs as she is a first-generation college student. She is beyond grateful for being accepted into the program at Morgan State University as it has given her the opportunity to become intimate with landscape architecture, and explore the expansive subjects it covers.

As she prepares for graduation and joining the workforce, she hopes to work in urban development and restoration. With climate change, the urban environment especially Baltimore is susceptible to sea-level rise, increased stormwater, drought, and more. Designing spaces and restoring abandoned sites can help soften the effects of this, as well as create more spaces for everyone to enjoy in the urban environment. Being considered for the MNLGA Scholarship will allow her to focus on school without the stress of having a lot of debt since she is paying for her education herself. Upon graduation, the scholarship will also allow her to focus on becoming a certified landscape architect, arborist, and other certifications like SITES.

Kayla Goldstein

Kayla had just finished making another multi-thousand-dollar cake sculpture, unsatisfied with her career trajectory, she started wondering, what else can she do with this Bachelor of Fine Art. After contemplating, it hit her like a Juglans nigra fruit on the noggin. She had always been an environmental science nerd - her family was shocked she chose art school. Plants would be her medium. Little did she know at the time, this journey would be much deeper an endeavor than making pretty landscapes. Landscapes are more than a painting or an elaborate sculpture, they are alive.

Within three months of her epiphany, she began attending the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) with the American Landscape Institute program. In addition, she was working at Babikow
Greenhouses learning everything there was to know about greenhouse production. She started learning more about the intrinsic relationships our native plants have with the landscape, and the way even some non-native plants can be beneficial for the health of an ecosystem. She started becoming obsessed with the role a plant plays in ecosystem functions, like water health and the nitrogen cycle. She finished up her program at CCBC and obtained an Associate of Applied Science in Horticulture, and Landscape Design & Installation Certification.

Around this time, she had an internship at Stoneleigh Gardens in the Philadelphia region of Pennsylvania. Being in a public garden was fantastic, seeing folks learning about plants while enjoying a public space made my heart sing. Her favorite space and in fact the favorite space of many of the other guests, was the parking lot. The Stoneleigh parking lot is gorgeous. It puts plants to work while looking seemingly effortless; you are very much in a parking lot, but you’re also already in the garden, a rain garden. She started realizing the potential in manipulating these mundane public spaces to create productive landscapes that provide experiences, ecological benefits, and stormwater remediation.

Fast forward, and she is currently entering her final year of a master’s in landscape architecture at Morgan State University. Her passions align with the goal of bridging the gap between horticulture and landscape architecture. She wants to create beautiful public landscapes that have the power to teach and change perspectives about something as simple as a parking lot.

Kayla enjoys utilizing the important ecological relationships plants have with the landscape, healing water and nitrogen cycles, and applying the knowledge she obtained while studying horticulture to create the perfect growing condition. She is currently interning with Baltimore Recreation & Parks, as well as Biohabitats Baltimore. These two landscape practice offices, one public, one private, one fully people-focused, and one ecology-minded, are helping her sow the seeds for her future career in Landscape. Being awarded this scholarship will allow her to continue focusing on her growth in the Biohabitats internships while attending school; instead of taking on part-time work, she will be able to fully focus on her studies.

**2022 Link Shanks Scholarship Recipient – Madeleine Tilley**

The Link Shanks Scholarship award, given annually through faculty nomination by UMD’s Plant Science and Landscape Architecture Department, honors Dr. Conrad Link and Dr. James Shanks as a tribute to their long years on campus in support of Maryland horticulture. This award is given to an undergraduate student as a junior who shows academic improvement and promise in horticulture.

Madeleine Tilley is a rising senior, working to earn her degree in Agricultural Science and Technology, with a Specialization in Environmental Horticulture alongside a minor in Sustainability Studies. She received her citation from the Environment, Technology, and Economy Scholars program, and is also a member of the University of Maryland's Horticulture Club. Madeleine is an exceptional student recognized for her dedication to coursework and perseverance during the height of COVID-19. Like many students, Madeleine has spent more than half of her college experience online, a feat in and of itself.

During the semesters of online schooling, Madeleine found her voice by working on a couple of small, organic farms that deepened her interest in building a sustainable community centered on sustainable crop production. She is currently working in a research lab evaluating crop safety of environmental horticulture crops. Through her coursework, field work and research experience, there is no doubt Madeleine Tilley will make a positive impact in the Maryland horticulture industry.