Zachary Leibovitch

Zachary is a current Agricultural Science and Technology student at the University of Maryland, with a degree focus of Environmental Horticulture. This scholarship will assist him in paying for his 2021 tuition and allow him to focus more of his time on coursework and horticulture related extra curriculars.

Along with his coursework, he is the president of the UMD horticulture club: a group of students dedicated to sharing a passion for plant cultivation and propagation. This year, with the hurdle of COVID-19, they hosted weekly online meetings, each specializing on a specific topic or guest speaker. He gave multiple presentations this past semester on keeping carnivorous plants in the home setting, in addition to orchid care.

As an Environmental Horticulture student, he focuses mainly on ornamental horticulture, and has a strong interest in many of its aspects. He is currently a nursery specialist at American Plant Food Company in Bethesda, Maryland and focuses on cold, hardy, woody plants, and landscape design. He enjoys assisting clients to create unique landscapes using uncommon plants. As an avid mountain biker and trail-goer, he discovers inspiration in natural Maryland and tries to recreate similar landscapes in the home setting, finding combinations of botanicals to provide year-round interest.

In addition to his work with cold hardy plants, his true passion is the broad genus Orchidaceae. He keeps a large collection of plants in the subfamily Cypripedioideae, and takes pride in learning each plant’s endemic range, blooming period, and specific cultivation requirements. He hopes to one day work with these plants in a conservation or conservatory setting, as they range from the Maryland Native Cypripedium to Asian Paphiopedilum.

This scholarship will help fund his interests in studying horticulture and foster his career development. He hopes to one day work in a botanic garden, managing a greenhouse, and in the field of conserving endangered plants.
Katie McCormick

Katie is a current graduate student studying landscape architecture at the University of Maryland. She carefully chose to expand her education after graduating with a bachelor’s degree in landscape management, with minors in environmental science and business, and has been working in the green industry since 2017.

Katie works for a design/build/maintain firm in Bethesda, MD where her responsibilities focus primarily on the maintenance of high-end residential gardens. While she loves her job and the work that she does, her professional goals include working with municipalities to create public gardens and spaces for all to enjoy, not just those who can afford gardens for themselves.

Through her work in the green industry, she’s come to understand first-hand the important role ornamental plants play in both our private and public spaces. She believes her strong plant knowledge differentiates her as a landscape architect and helps make her projects more sustainable and resilient. Plants play a vital role in gardens: they stabilize erosion, mitigate storm water, contribute to a diverse biological ecosystem, and are a source of our own enjoyment. Knowing the unique characteristics of a broad plant palette and how these plants are best cared for strengthens her designs by maximizing the effectiveness of the plants chosen and requiring less maintenance. Using clean lines in her designs, her personal design aesthetic allows the plantings to speak for themselves and become the focus of the garden.

Working as a landscape architect, she hopes to design spaces that take advantage of nature-based solutions to address the impacts of climate change, including stormwater runoff and rising sea levels, that are becoming increasingly problematic.

As a graduate student she has excelled in her courses and is building on her previous educational and work experiences. These strengths and experiences will prepare her in a unique way to work on large-scale public landscape projects to benefit communities. Although she is working full time while in graduate school, she still needs to finance the cost of tuition and fees. The student loan debt she will incur to finish her degree will impact her future life decisions, and she finds the risks daunting. The assistance she will receive as a beneficiary of this scholarship will help offset some of those expenses.

She is hopeful that being a recipient of the MNLGA scholarship will help her to further her academic and career goals, which in turn, will benefit communities at large.
Ellie Chetelat

Ellie is a graduate student at Morgan State University. She first became interested in studying landscape architecture while working at Herring Run plant nursery in Baltimore, where she became familiar with many native plants of our region. She brought home different species each week to plant in her garden so she could observe and better appreciate the unique character of each species—how it changes throughout the seasons and adapts to its environment, and how different species interact with each other to create an aesthetically pleasing and ecologically productive space. She continued to pursue her interest in horticulture by becoming a Baltimore City Master Gardener and joining the Maryland Native Plant Society.

In 2017, she started working at a design/build landscape architecture firm, Underwood & Associates, which specializes in ecological restoration of streams, wetlands, and shorelines throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Part of her role as a project coordinator included reviewing planting plans, procuring plant material, visiting job sites to identify salvageable plants prior to construction, and supervising the installation of planting plans on constructed restoration sites.

Her combined work and volunteer experiences helped her realize that her passion for plants could be further developed into a career and in 2019 she decided to pursue a Master of Landscape Architecture degree. Her approach to studying landscape architecture has been focused on how vegetation can create space and how design can enhance the existing qualities of a site to create a unique human experience, while also improving ecological function and creating habitat for native flora and fauna.

After graduating, she hopes to practice landscape architecture in a way that allows her to create spaces that are aesthetically pleasing, socially and culturally engaging, and ecologically productive. She would like to work on diverse projects, including residential, commercial, and public sites, within the Mid-Atlantic region. She is interested in working for a design/build firm so she can continue to spend time in the field, but she has also considered working in the public sector.

When she started school in 2019, she was working full-time for the first semester, but her health and studies suffered. She adjusted to a part-time work schedule in the following semester, but she suffered financially as her hours were reduced from 40 hours a week to 15-20 hours a week and she was no longer eligible for benefits such as health insurance. In order to graduate in 2022, she needs to take a full course load each semester from the 2021-2022 academic year. This will be impossible to do without financial aid. This scholarship will support her in her pursuit of becoming a landscape architect by helping her not to incur substantial debt and by providing her with opportunities to expand her professional network through a membership to the Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association.