



*Bill Calkins, Treasurer  
WNLA 2014 - 2015*

# The Last 25 Years

1990 ~ 2015

By: Bill Calkins

*Bill Calkins capitalizes on his retail garden center background to spot the latest trends and creative strategies, positioning products and developing programs for retail garden centers and the growers that supply them. Bill has been editor of Today's Garden Center and Green Profit and is currently in Marketing with Ball Horticultural Company in Chicago.*

Starting its Second Century with a solid foundation, and with Harlan Hamernik as president, the Western Association celebrated its centennial with a Champagne and Hors d'oeuvre Party on the Sunday evening of the Western. The 1990 Western, held at the Hilton Plaza Inn and Kansas City Marriott Plaza, marked Ed Gray's final convention as Executive Director. Helping plan the Western was one of his legacies - strong association leadership with 14 committees including Legislative, Decorations, and everything in between.

## **John J. Pinney Scholarship Winners**

Natasha Raechell Rice, Oklahoma State University

Andrew Wilkins, Oklahoma State University

## **Grants-in-Aid Scholarship Winner**

Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture, Oklahoma State University

**Grand Prize** at the "Celebration 100" Awards Ball was a trip for two to Maui.

In 1991, with Robert A. Graham at the helm, the Western Association named Sarah Woody Bibens Executive Director. Marking a newfound commitment to technology, the Western offered audio tapes of the show speeches and presentations at the Hilton Plaza Inn and KC Marriott Plaza. Also at the show, a new logo was unveiled and at the Annual Awards Ball, the Skip Hawkins Orchestra and Heart of America Chorus entertained a packed room.

**Grand Prize** at the Annual Awards Ball was a 4-day cruise on Carnival Cruise Line's Fantasy Ship.

This year, the Western trade show moved to the Hyatt Regency Crown Center and there were exhibits on the first and third floors. This expanded show allowed for more exhibitors and Association President Bernie Hillermann oversaw the board awarding a grant to the KSU Department of Horticulture for research by Steven C. Wiest on "Influence to Acclimation of Drought on the Transplant Survival of Woody Plants."

**Annual Awards Ball** featured the Doug Atwater Ensemble and Wes Harrison, the Original Mr. Sound Effects.

**John J. Pinney** scholarships were awarded to Allen Steenbock and Troy Gormally, both Kansas State University students.

In 1993, collaboration was king with member associations NNLA, KNLA and MLNA holding state meetings at the Western. Roger Bell was president and he welcomed Dr. Kenneth Stone as keynote lecturer on the topic, "Competing with the Mass Merchandisers: in an effort to help members understand the new retail marketplace.

**The Annual Awards Ball** included dinner and dancing for members and music by Michael Beers Band and entertainment by Spontaneous Combustion.

**JJP Scholarships** were awarded to Chad Meyers and Jeff Rosener of Iowa State University. Both men received an all-expenses paid trip to the AAN Management Clinic.

In 1994, one of the best-attended seminars was Charles Dunn, the founder of Garden Center Institute in Florida who explained that the 1990s is the decade of the consumer and went in depth on the differences of "gardeners" and "yardeners". Dunn was ahead of his time! Jolene Brown also spoke on "Successful Changers", people who are unthreatened by chaos and actually have fun with change.

**Best Booth Award** was given to Henri Studio.

**Some of the Best New Products** displayed were Stark Bros. Colonnade Apple Tree and Forrest Keeling's Asimina triloba.

The Western really shined in 1995, launching a New Variety area at the show and adding the third floor of the Hyatt Regency Crown Center for exhibits! President Dennis McDermott held the Annual Banquet at the Westin Crown Center Hotel with a lovely cocktail hour by the waterfall. Music and entertainment were provided by the Michael Beers Band and Bob Dolibois, Executive Vice President of AAN was the keynote speaker. Once again, KSU alumni gathered at the show, demonstrating the amazing networking opportunities the show has always fostered.

**In 1995**, show registration was \$25 for members and \$45 for non-members.

**JJP Scholarships** were awarded to Samantha Link of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; Sheryl Marie Speer from Iowa State University and Margaret Wolf of Oklahoma State University. Each received the opportunity to attend the Management Clinic in Louisville, Kentucky.

**The 1995 Grant Winner** was Oklahoma State University for "Development of an Integrated Fertilizer and Irrigation Management System".

For the first time ever, all five states (INLA, KNLA, MLNA, NNLA and ONLA) held State Meetings at the Western in 1996! All involved, including President Jim Zangger,

agreed it is this type of engagement that makes a regional association strong. The Annual Banquet was held at the Westin again, with entertainment by Ida McBeth. Adding excitement and maybe a little sense of competition to the Trade Show, Best Booth Awards were given for the first time – a tradition that will last for many years.

**The 1996 Grant** was awarded to University of Missouri for “Optimizing the Irrigation System for the Missouri Gravel Bed”.

**JJP Scholarships** were given to Cynthia Christiansen of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; William Mosher of Oklahoma State University; Jannie Serna of University of Missouri and Joanna Stookey of Iowa State University. All four attended the Management Clinic.

The Banquet in 1997 was once again so well attended that a venue the size of the Westin Crown Center was required. Entertainment was provided by Tim Whitmer and KC Express and the attitude going into the new year with President Rick Barrett was as upbeat as the music!

**JJP Scholarships** to the Management Clinic were awarded to Beth Parrill, Chad Odvody and Jude Werner of University of Nebraska – Lincoln and Jennifer Neujahr of Kansas State University.

The year 1998, marked the beginning of the Jim Pekosh Greening of the Midwest Memorial. The Memorial was established as a result of an extremely generous donation

from Claire Pekosh in memory of her husband. The Memorial is awarded annually to a public greening project among the states of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Iowa and Missouri. The first recipient was Friends University in Wichita, Kansas.

The 1998 event theme was “Jazz Up Your January” with a dinner at the New Dinner Theater. President Gary Lewien presided over the annual banquet at the Westin, with entertainment by Heart of America Chorus.

**JJP Scholarships** to Management Clinic were awarded to Marc Terrell and Gary Farris of Oklahoma State University; Marc Tanking, Christopher Ohlde and Todd Lagerman of Kansas State University and Thomas Schultz of Iowa State University.

**The 1998 Grant Winner** was Iowa State University to produce a four-color publication to help consumers and professionals select and plant the very best crabapple taxa.

Themed “The Winning Edge,” the 1999 Western kicked off under the leadership of President Marty Johnson with a fun networking event at the Kansas City Jazz Museum and Negro League Baseball Museum with Buck O’Neil. The keynote speaker at the event was Olympic Gold Medalist Josh Davis. It was this year that the Ladies Luncheon became an “optional event” and a Horticultural Faculty Roundtable was launched. The annual Banquet was again held at the Westin with Comedian Bucky Walters getting the crowd excited for the coming season.

**JJP Scholarships** were awarded to Leanne Erickson of University of Missouri; Kyoko Ilegami and Julie Miller of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; Kelly Rhodes of Oklahoma State; Fili Sanchez of Kansas State University and Andrew Schmitz of Iowa State University.

University of Nebraska – Lincoln was given the **annual Grant for “Evaluation and Selection of Ornamental Plants for Landscape Use.**

**The Peckosh Memorial** was awarded to Truman State University.

January 2000 marked a new millennium and the show theme was “The Big Show.” Under President Hugh K. Stevenson, the Western was the very first show to be held in the brand new Crown Center Exhibit Hall. Believe it or not, the venue was completed the night before exhibitor move in! Booths were set in the Exhibit Hall, Hyatt Second Floor Bridgeway and the Pershing Exhibit Hall, making the recent growth of the show very visible.

The annual Tour, Dinner and Theater event was held at Union Station with a technology theme. Speakers Mary Jameson and Julie Wayman discussed “Web Power: Harvest the Green” and “Powerful Potential: Cash in on the Web.” The Banquet was held at the Hyatt with entertainment by the St. Louis Stompers Dixieland Band.

**Scholarships** were awarded to Benjamin Hastreiter and Grant Jones of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; Carol La Faver of Iowa State University, Kelly Nierman of University of Missouri and Lisa Quitter of Oklahoma State University.

**The Peckosh Memorial** was given to Del City, Oklahoma.

Following up on the success of the Y2K event, the 2001 Western was themed “The Big Show Returns” and was officially endorsed by KNLA and MLNA. President Jan Olsen kicked off many new Western “experiences” including a new Networking Reception and the WNLA.org Coffee Shop, two immediately popular new opportunities for attendees! The annual dinner was held at Majestic Steakhouse and entertainment was a Cabaret Revue at Quality Hill Playhouse.

Also new in 2001 was a Networking Reception called Starlight Lounge, developed as a social event raising money to benefit HRI. Trade Show booths expanded again, including the three previous locations (Crown Center Exhibit Hall, Hyatt Bridgeway, Pershing Exhibit Hall) and adding Lobby Alcoves for additional space.

**Member dues** were raised from \$20 to \$25.

**ANLA held a Town Meeting** at the Western.

There was a replica **Pace Car from the Kansas Speedway** on site at the show.

Themed “Rev Up for 2002!” attendees of the 2002 Western experienced the #24 Jeff Gordon Pepsi Racing Simulator in the Exhibit Hall. President Eric Sjulín welcomed more than 50 new exhibitors to the show, bringing the total number of states represented to more than 20 states and provinces.

Reflecting the theme, the annual tour included a behind-the-scenes look at the new Kansas Speedway with dinner at Union Station and “Super Speedway Extreme Screen” at IMAX. Second Edition Starlight Lounge Pins were sold to benefit HRI, further demonstrating WNLA’s commitment to the future of our industry.

**Scholarships were awarded** to Nicole Claeys and Tom Hughes of Iowa State University; Christina Cyza of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; Christopher Feldkamp and Megan Murphy of Kansas State University; Holly Houk of Northwest Missouri State and Faculty Winner Dave Edwards of Oklahoma State University.

**The 2002 Grant** was awarded to Mark Gleason and Jeffrey Iles of Iowa State University for “Development and Evaluation of Techniques for Management of Sclerotium rolfsii Crown Rot of Hosta.”

Swanson Park Arboretum in Omaha received the **Peckosh Memorial**.

**The Western program booklet** included a “Web Directory” with 10 companies listed the first year.

**Membership** dues were raised to \$35.

Kicking off with an Airline History Museum Event, a record-breaking crowd was “Taking Off” with the Western” at the show in 2003. There was an exhibitor waiting list and the sale of Third Edition Starlight Lounge Pins raised thousands of dollars at the evening event, which moved to the Hyatt Lobby with live jazz piano. President Nick Hand and the Board decided to provide a concierge staff for the first time and attendees agreed it was much appreciated.

In addition to the state certification exams that had been offered at the Western for years, the Western ramped up its educational value by providing Irrigation Certification Exams and the Associate Landscape Contractors of America’s Landscape Professionals Exam.

**Scholarship winners** were Katina Grimes of Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, Mike Albert of Oklahoma State University; Wally Cottrell of Northwest Missouri State University; Kevin Frack and David Rowan of Kansas State University. Faculty Winners are Barb Osborn of Iowa State University and Steve Rodie of University of Nebraska – Lincoln and Omaha.

**The 2003 Grant** was awarded to Dr. Sharon von Broembsen of Oklahoma State University for “Plant Pathogen Management in Recycling Irrigation Systems”.

**The Peckosh Memorial Award** was given to The Brenton Arboretum in Dallas Center, Iowa.

In 2004, some Harleys roared into the Western exhibit hall as some attendees got up close and personal for the ribbon cutting! The theme was “Get Ready – Let’s Ride” and President E. B. Gee and the Board stepped up the educational offering with two tracks of speakers for the first time.

One of the most exciting moments of the 2004 Western was the opportunity for some attendees and exhibitors to tour the new Overland Park Convention Center in preparation for the Big Move there in 2005.

**Forrest Keeling donated \$50,000** to HRI in honor of Hugh A. Stevenson

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Starlight Lounge Pin** was offered as an HRI fund raiser.

**Scholarship winners** were Eric Kohnen and Lindsay Pietsch of Iowa State University; Barbara Stuckey of Metropolitan Community College of Omaha; Shan Owen of Kansas State University and Alicia Legleiter and Derek McCall of Oklahoma State University.

**The Pekosh Memorial Award** was given to The Binkley Garden of Topeka.

The year 2005 was the best ever, in terms of total attendees (4,200), booths sold (540) and member firms (1400)! Under the leadership of President Bryan Kinghorn, the 2005 show continued its tradition of excellence with top-notch presenters including Julie Moir Messervey on home landscapes, Tony Avent on putting the fun back into gardening, Judy

Sharpton presenting “Retail Ready” from the show floor and many more.

Collaboration was on display in 2005 with participating associations The Horticulture Coop of Metro St. Louis, The Hort NetWORK, INLA, Kansas Greenhouse Growers Association, KNLA, Lawn & Garden Dealers Association, MLNA, NNLA, ONLA and PGMS.

**The Starlight Lounge** networking reception continued with a goal of raising money for HRI.

Exhibitors were able to quickly capture sales leads using **Laser Leads Retrieval Systems at the Western.**

Attendees of the 2006 Western had the opportunity to win a Ford Escape Hybrid Lease and \$3,000 Cash from Gard’N-Wise and Thoroughbred Ford and that only highlighted some of the fun that year. There was a two-day estimating and bidding workshop led by Charles Vander Kooi and a full selection of Irrigation Association Seminars.

Certifications were offered for KNLA, MLNA, PLANET, IA, PGMS.

There were 550 booths at the 2006 show.

To help attendees capitalize on the Outdoor Kitchen Trend, Sturgis Materials created an outdoor living space and provided education on sectional outdoor kitchen cabinetry, outdoor fireplace kits and flagstone installation.

The 2007 Western featured an opportunity to win a new Ford Escape Hybrid Lease and \$3,000 and that kicked off a busy year for President Steve Ritter. Special friend of the show, Dr. Michael Dirr, led a Colloquium of “Featured Speakers Who Practice the Art and Science of Birthing New Plants for American Gardens” to a full house of attendees. It was an amazing collection of knowledge from some of horticulture’s greatest minds; it featured Dr. Michael Dirr, Harold Pellet, Geoff Needham, Jonathan Pedersen, Randy Davis and Cameron Rees.

Also new and on trend in 2007 was an Outdoor Living Space that was created in the convention center. Attendees and exhibitors alike enjoyed this space and left with inspiration and left inspired.

LGDA, the Horticulture Coop of Metro St. Louis; The Hort NetWORK, KGGA and Plants of Merit Board of Advisors **held meetings at Western.**

There was **PGMS and PLANET Certification Testing.**

**Scholarships were awarded** to Jessica Goebel of Kansas State University; Betsy Mogler of Iowa Lakes Community College; Alyssa Strapp of University of Nebraska – Lincoln and Ann Crockett of Oklahoma State University. The 2007 Faculty Winner was Kevin Fehr at Iowa Lakes Community College.

**The Pekosh Memorial Award** was given to the Habitat for Humanity of Omaha.

In 2008, the Western launched Western University with Kat Nurseries as the sponsor. Special recognition is given to Dr. Jason Griffin who organized the programming and continues to put together cutting-edge lineups of speakers, magazine articles and blogs over the years.

The “Western Pub” was also new in 2008 with food from Jack Stack BBQ and a drawing for a trip to French Polynesia. Collaboration with other groups continued to grow including the ASLA Prairie Gateway Chapter conducting an exam in conjunction with the show, PLANET Certifications offered, PGMS certifications, and seminars for Irrigation Association members were hosted by the Western in 2008.

**Scholarships were awarded** to Stephanie Blum of University of Nebraska – Lincoln; Justin Lingo of Oklahoma State University, Jamie Terveer of Iowa Lakes Community College, Matthew Long of Kansas State University and Faculty Winner Steven Rodie of University of Nebraska – Lincoln.

**The Peckosh Memorial** was given to Cedar Valley Arboretum & Botanic Gardens in Waterloo, Iowa.

**The Western went “paperless”** in 2008, with speaker handouts available online.

With the theme, “A Tradition, Yet Innovative and Progressive,” the 2009 Western Show welcomed its first female board president (installed as President in 2008), Nancy Blecha. WNLA has always been progressive. Its members are responsible for countless

innovations over the years. And the tradition continues!

Some of the 2009 Western educational session highlights included legendary bug and greenhouse pest expert, Dr. Raymond Cloyd on Emerald Ash Borer and a “Donuts to Dollars” panel discussion with an assortment of innovative and technical product developments in hardscapes. The National Concrete Masonry Association held seminars at the show.

Special recognition is given to Dr. Michael Dirr, a true friend of the show. In 2009, he hosted and moderated a packed-house Colloquium with Peter Cummin, Jason Griffin and Alan Branhagen.

**Scholarships were awarded** to Jessica Feuerbach of Northwest Missouri State University and Brian Marble of Iowa Lakes Community College. The 2009 Faculty Winner was Dr. Christopher Starbuck of University of Missouri.

In an effort to reduce environmental impact, the printed magazine was discontinued and those resources reallocated to digital communications.

**The Peckosh Memorial** was awarded to Community Living Opportunities Midnight Farm project, with a donation matched by Kokopelli Nursery.

The Western hit a record \$32,000 in advertising equivalence by swapping out ads for media access and display space.

The year 2010 was a year of Connection! The Western was officially on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube with a robust website and digital communication strategy. The WNLA E-newsletter mailed weekly to more than 9,000 readers in 2010!

This Connection translated to the most educational opportunities ever available at the Western. With FIVE tracks of education covering business, horticulture, design/build, product innovation and of course Western University, the show had something for everyone! Leading-edge sessions including Rain Gardens, Energy-Efficient LED Lighting and Stormwater Management demonstrated WNLA's commitment to providing the best education to its members.

Tuesday was dropped as a show day in an effort to help exhibitors who needed to get to the MANTS Show.

There was a popular GIE Media Café.

One of the most talked about sessions was “Kitchen Gardening” with Patty Moreno.

**Scholarships** were given to Trevor Harson of Iowa Lakes Community College and Casey Crossland of Kansas State University.

**The Peckosh Memorial** was awarded to Veterans of Foreign Wars, Max W. Mueller Post 2661 in Washington, MO.

In 2011, under Presidents Jim Mason and Shane Berry, the Western evolved into the National Green Centre and moved to St. Louis in an effort to reenergize the show and



reverse downward trends that were affecting not only our show but all trade shows and events. There was a clear trend toward education-based national shows and the Board made a conscious decision to explore this path.

As “The New Leader in Education and Trade”, the show underwent a complete makeover and launched the immediately memorable robotic hand holding a tree with the tagline “the next generation green industry event.” At the inaugural show, there was 90 hours of world-



class education with speakers from 18 states and three continents.

Dr. Michael and Bonnie Dirr hosted the first Sweet Melissa Fashion Show featuring the trendiest new plants in horticulture. There was a popular Plant Walk hosted by Dr. Dirr in the Missouri Botanical Garden. Session topics included Selling Green, Edibles, Mobile Media, Integrated Design, SITES and more. There was also a Horticulture in

2060 panel discussion that included Anna Ball, Dr. Michael Dirr and Jeffrey Bruce. The National Green Center University was again led by Dr. Jason Griffin who welcomed Dr. Stuart Warren, Dr. Ted Bilderback, Dr. Jim Owen, Dr. Michael Dossman, Dr. Richard Olsen and Dr. Dave Creech.

The second year of the National Green Centre was back in Overland Park, Kansas and President Shane Berry was excited to offer free tours at Powell Gardens Heartland Harvest Garden, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts and Birds Botanicals. Some of the most popular workshops and seminars in 2012 were related to sustainability and resource management – LEED certification, SITES training, sessions on Natives and Edibles, Storm Water Management, BMPs and Living Building codes to name a few.

There was a free exhibit hall only pass.

National Garden Center University continued as a fantastic resource for members.

*Plant Photo Credit: Euro.American Propagators' SUPERBELLS(R) Cherry Star*

Western 2013 was in St. Louis and took a look to the future under President Mark West with an action-packed lunch panel that took a hard look at the future of the industry by asking the question, “What will horticulture look like in 2063?” On-floor education was a hit in 2013, with a wide assortment of Roundtable Discussions and Learning Centers aimed at all segments of the industry.

With keynotes from Dr. Michael and Bonnie Dirr, Dr. Peter Raven and legendary University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley attendees saw no lack of star power. Almost as exciting was the annual Fashion Show, which evolved to include a public showing at the Mizzou Botanic Garden.

Once again, sustainability was king with well attended SITES sessions.

Another hot topic, with a dedicated educational session, was healthcare reform.

In 2014 under President Sandi Hillermann McDonald, the Board made the decision to return to The Western as a name and move back to an event focused on the trade show with more education on the show floor, allowing attendees to reduce travel time and guaranteeing the vendors have the attendees’ attention. With on-floor education, learning centers and roundtable discussions, there’s plenty of opportunity to network, while still attending to the work at hand.

The fashion show once again evolved and is now a show of plants AND products! With

more and more exhibitors “modeling” the products, creativity continues to escalate.

There was a dedicated GrowNative! area allowing attendees to learn more about this partner organization.

Continuing a tradition of relevant education, one of the few sessions focused on “navigating health reform.”