

# PLSC Productivity

NEWS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF  
PLANT & SOIL SCIENCES



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
**AGRICULTURE &  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

## Chair's Corner

Welcome to summer! Everyone in PLSC is hard at work on field and lab research, attending scientific and educational conferences, taking well-earned vacations, and getting prepared for teaching fall classes. We're proud to announce an excellent incoming freshmen and transfer class of 11 Landscape Architecture and 8 Plant Science students. We are also hard at work rolling out a new major called Sustainable Food Systems. In Spring 2019, Dr. Erin Sparks taught the first official class for this major focused mostly on understanding controlled environment horticulture and learning how to build hydroponic systems. We had a full enrollment of 20 students from various majors across campus! This fall, Dr. Gordon Johnson will teach the initial offering of "Introduction to Sustainable Food Systems." Finally, we have just launched a search for a new faculty member to teach and do research in the areas of Controlled Environment Agriculture and Urban Agriculture. In next summer's newsletter I'll plan on reporting that this hire has started and that s/he will be the initial advisor to a good number of incoming Sustainable Food Systems students.



Congratulations to everyone who participated in the CANR Research Symposium on May 3. Thanks much to Dr. Eric Wommack and Barbra Ferrell for organizing and running such a great event. PLSC was very well represented in the awards. Congratulations to students and faculty advisors listed below!

Best poster awards were given out under CANR's 5 Unique Research Strength categories; PLSC folks received 3 of 5.  
**Climate Change:** Dr. Josep Barba (post-doc, Vargas Lab) **Genetics and genomics:** Dr. Kun Huang (post-doc, Caplan Lab)  
**Sustainable food systems, landscapes and ecosystems:** Ms. Lauren Mosesso (Ph.D. student, Shober Lab)

First through third place awards based on student level:

- Post-doc, 1st place: Dr. Vinay Nagarajan (Green Lab)
- Ph.D. student, 3rd place: Ms. Taozhu Sun (Jin Lab)
- M.S. student, 1st place: Mr. Tim Chaya (Donofrio/Caplan Lab)
- M.S. student, 3rd place: Ms. Victoria Gundlah (Bais Lab)
- B.S. student, 2nd place: Mr. Kona Haramoto (incoming M.S. student in Fuhrmann Lab)



I was one of the judges this year (for many non-PLSC posters) and was very impressed with the high-quality research and mentoring on display!

### College and Departmental Awards of Distinction

Two of the CANR's top internal awards were won by member's of PLSC! Pictured here at the CANR Convocation on May 31 are **CANR Excellence in Teaching and Advising Award** winner Dr. Thomas Evans (*top photo, shown with Dean Rieger*) and **CANR Excellence in Service Award for Administrative Support Staff** winner Academic Support Coordinator Ms. Susan Biddle (*middle photo, shown with Dean Rieger*).



**Plant & Soil Sciences Faculty Award:** Ms. Margaret R. Heffernan (*bottom photo, far left*)

**Dean's Award for Undergraduate Excellence:** Ms. Danielle Mikolajewski (*bottom photo, far right*)



Additionally, the William J. Benton Graduate Student Award is given to the top graduate students in CANR—and both level award winners for 2019 are housed in PLSC!

Mr. Tyler Sowers, Ph.D., Plant & Soil Sciences (D. Sparks Lab)

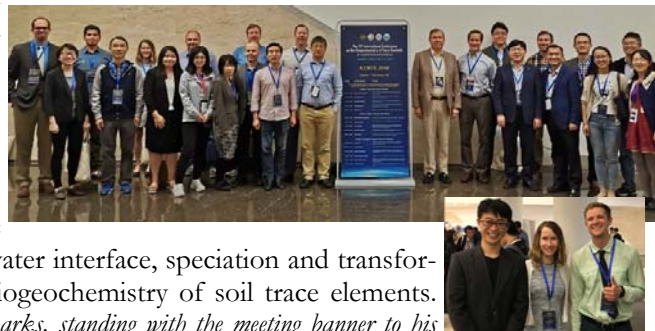
Ms. Alyssa Lutgen, M.S., Water Science & Policy (Inamdar Lab)



## Honorifics

### Don Sparks honored in China in May 2019

Several current PLSC members as well as PLSC alumni who studied under Dr. Donald L. (Don) Sparks organized and participated in a symposium at the 15th International Conference on Biogeochemistry of Trace Elements (ICOBTE) in Nanjing, China to celebrate his 40-year career since starting as an assistant professor of soil science at UD. Dr. Sparks is a pioneer in the application of novel techniques (e.g., EXAFS and FTIR) in soil mineral/water interface chemistry. The symposium focused on the application of these techniques in understanding trace element partitioning at the soil/water interface, speciation and transformation of trace elements in soil and sediments, and microscale biogeochemistry of soil trace elements. Pictured are (top) colleagues, collaborators, and former graduate students with Sparks, standing with the meeting banner to his right and (inset, from left) recent Seyffferth PLSC M.S. graduate Weida Wu, PLSC Associate Professor and conference invited speaker Dr. Angelia Seyffferth, and current Seyffferth PLSC M.S. graduate student Frank Linam.



Dr. Sparks elaborated on the recognition: “The meeting on the biogeochemistry of trace metals in Nanjing was wonderful. I gave a plenary talk at the meeting, and a two-day symposium was held to honor me for my 40 years of scientific contributions. About 30 of my former students, postdocs, and visiting professors were there and made presentations. Scott Fendorf, Huffington Professor at Stanford, and one of my Ph.D. students, gave an excellent introductory talk reviewing my career at Delaware. Before the conference I went to Tianjin University where I was given an Honorary Professorship. One of my former postdocs, who is at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Beijing, organized an international workshop on “Frontiers in Molecular Environmental Soil Science.” I gave a plenary talk at the workshop. All in all, it was a fabulous trip.”

The National Association of Plant Breeders (NAPB) recently recognized six outstanding students for the 2019 class of NAPB Borlaug Graduate Scholars, and Heather Manching, Ph.D. student of Dr. Randy Wisser, was selected! These awards are given to exceptional students aspiring to a career in the field of plant breeding and genetics who have a strong desire to contribute to the improvement of the plants that we all depend upon for our daily needs. Included is a travel grant and participation in a professional development mentoring program. Heather is also a National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) pre-doctoral fellow.

The following students have recently received prestigious UD- and CANR-based awards:

**Mr. Sean Fettrow**, Ph.D. student of Dr. Angelia Seyffferth, is the recipient of a CANR Unique Strengths Graduate Fellowship.

**Mr. Anthony Hollenback**, Ph.D. student of Dr. Deb Jaisi, is the recipient of a CANR Unique Strengths Graduate Fellowship.

**Ms. Virginia Jeppi**, Ph.D. student of Dr. Shreeram Inamdar, is the recipient of a CANR Unique Strengths Graduate Fellowship and a Unidel Distinguished Graduate Scholars award.

**Ms. Danielle Mikolajewski**, M.S. student of Dr. Tara Trammell, is the recipient of an Innovations in Plant Science Fellowship.

**Ms. Emma Ruggerio**, M.S. student of Dr. Jules Bruck, is the recipient of an Innovations in Plant Science Fellowship.

**Mr. Saiqi Zeng**, Ph.D. student of Dr. Yan Jin, is the recipient of a CANR Unique Strengths Graduate Fellowship.

*Congratulations to these students, especially those joining the PLSC family this summer and fall!*

## Faculty Highlights

Congratulations are in order for recent faculty promotions:

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Dr. Mark Isaacs to Associate Professor

Dr. Nicole Donofrio to Professor

Dr. Amy Shober to Professor

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***PLSC had the most promotions compared to the other departments within CANR. Keep up the good work!***



## Events and Outreach

CANR Dean and PLSC faculty Dr. Mark Rieger emceed a ceremony to recognize distinguished CANR alumni and the 50th winner of the Agricultural Alumni Association's George M. Worrilow Award. He summarized: "On April 15, we honored seven distinguished alumni and their families, along with Steven Leath, President of Auburn University and our 50th Worrilow Award recipient. President Leath gave an outstanding speech on the future of land-grant universities in the new Audion facility on STAR Campus (*top photo*). About a dozen former Worrilow Awardees were on-hand, each given a special lapel pin to commemorate the event. It was a full day of celebration with a distinguished alumni lunch, the award ceremony and a dinner for Steve and Janet Leath, and retired faculty and Leath colleagues Dr. Jim Hawk and Dr. Bob Carroll at President Assanis' house." (*Editor's note: Dr. Leath earned his M.S. in Plant Pathology in 1981; Drs. Hawk and Carroll are PLSC emeritus professors. Bottom photo, from left are: Dean Rieger, UD Provost and CANR Professor Dr. Robin Morgan, UD President Dennis Assanis, Mrs. Janet Leath, and Dr. Steven Leath.*)



The other awardees from PLSC at the April 15 ceremony were:

**Distinguished Alumni** (less than 20 years since graduation):

Grace Chapman Elton, 2008 M.S., Public Horticulture. CEO, Tower Hill Botanic Garden, Massachusetts (*pictured with PLSC emeritus professor Dr. Bob Lyons and Dean Rieger*)



**Distinguished Alumni:**

Dr. Michael Graham, 1990 M.S., Plant Breeding. Head of Plant Breeding, Bayer Crop Sciences, St. Louis, Missouri (*pictured with Dr. Hawk, PLSC Chair Dr. Erik Ervin, and Dean Rieger*)

To teach the public more about plants at CANR's April 27 Ag Day, students from the Botany II class (taught by Dr. Jung-Youn Lee) manned a table where visitors looked through microscopes at plant parts and learned about less common plants via specimens brought in from the botany plant collection in Fischer Greenhouse. *Pictured left to right are David Bacigalupi, Whitney Deflieze, Kirstie Niesson, and Teaching Assistant Lindsay Erndwein (Ph.D. student of Dr. Erin Sparks). Crouching is Nathan Dolde.*



On May 21 PLSC members who attended our departmental spring ice cream social garden party not only enjoyed a delicious UDairy treat, but had a chance to wish a long-time faculty member well on his retirement. Dr. John Frett—thank you for your many years of teaching, and developing the surroundings of CANR with a natural treasure, the UD Botanic Gardens (where the social was held, incidentally)!

*Dr. Frett and his wife Jeanne display a parting gift of a photo collage illustrating UDBG through the seasons.*



## Ready – Set – Grow!

The renovation (well, at least interior demolition) of WorriLOW Hall has begun!! It took until well into June but all who needed to move into swing space are now either in a trailer complex on the STAR campus (just beyond the Amtrak station), at the Delaware Biotechnology Institute, or in Fischer Greenhouse. Swing space will remain in effect until at least the fall of 2020. Dr. Deb Jaisi's research group has permanently joined Dr. Don Sparks' and Dr. Yan Jin's groups in the Harker ISE Lab on main campus. Pictured upper left and middle is room 212 before and after packing; upper right shows the building without the crosswalk (for those who remember) nor the 3rd-floor bricked-in doorway. Bot-



*Better late than never! From October 4, 2016 - Congratulations to John Denlinger, B.S. 1985, currently employed by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. NJDA received an award in 2017 for his work with the National Organic Program's Organic Integrity Database as well. John shares:*

“Secretary Fisher is proud to share the announcement that John Denlinger, Division of Marketing and Development, was part of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Organic Integrity Database Team. This team developed and launched the Organic Integrity Database that provides up to date information about certified organic operations to the public. The team is the recent recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Honor Award, presented last month by Tom Vilsack, (then) USDA Secretary of Agriculture.”



We encourage alumni to send us news to keep us informed! A new job, a promotion, a personal or professional award... they're all accomplishments we want to know! Email a note or a press release, including your graduation year, to [mpautler@udel.edu](mailto:mpautler@udel.edu)

We are seeking to showcase alumni stories on a bulletin board in the PLSC corridor of Townsend Hall. We would like to highlight the career paths of our former students to current and prospective students and their families. If you are interested in providing a 250-words or less description of your career path from your PLSC education to your current job, along with a photo showing you at said job, please email [mpautler@udel.edu](mailto:mpautler@udel.edu) for more details.

## Back Porch Business

Please consider making a DONATION to the PLSC department to support, for example: student travel to research meetings and professional development events or to fund stipends for undergraduate summer research and/or Extension scholars. One hundred percent of your gifts will impact the program you wish to support. You may make your gift to the University, the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources or another program by visiting [www.udel.edu/development/makeagift.htm](http://www.udel.edu/development/makeagift.htm) **However, designating the gift specifically to our department (PLSC) ensures that it will be used in direct support of PLSC students and faculty. Be sure to complete the “Other designation – indicate a specific purpose below” section and input “Dept. of Plant and Soil Sciences”.** If you have any questions or require assistance to complete any of these forms, please contact Dan Sarkissian, Director of Development, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at 302-831-4595 or [djs@udel.edu](mailto:djs@udel.edu)

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