

# Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association Newsletter

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## SPRING



**BENNETT'S  
CREEK  
NURSERY**

*Profile: page 21* 

*Bloming  
& Beautiful*



Virginia  
Nursery &  
Landscape  
Association



## Member Profile - Bennett's Creek Nursery



Bennett's Creek Nursery is a wholesale container grower and landscape supply distributor. Our operation includes five locations that consist of a 375 acre growing facility and four full-service landscape distribution centers. Our locations range from Williamsburg, VA to near the Outer Banks of North Carolina. We grow a broad range of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees ranging from 6" to 25-gallon containers. We were proud to be named "Nursery Grower of the Year" by Nursery Management magazine in 2011.



We promote our products for garden centers through our **Blooming & Beautiful™** brand by offering color picture tags, POP materials, and a consumer website that features our products and those who sell them. One of the unique things we have done is to market plants to garden center buyers on a display van. We modified a Sprinter van to have shelving and lights to display our plants to buyers on a regular basis. We want to keep our customers in the loop on what is blooming and beautiful right then.



*Williamsburg Distribution Center*

**Our landscape distribution centers supply landscape contractors with plants, bulk materials, hardscapes, tools, and accessories.** We try to be a one-stop-shop to be convenient to the contractor. Delivery service is offered on flatbeds with forklift service, dump trucks, and enclosed trailers. The majority of plants that we sell come from our growing facility. The rest of the material comes from around the country to give us the broad selection that contractors demand.



*Isle of Wight Farm*

**We have been in business nearly 40 years and contribute much of our success to being involved with industry groups such as VNLA.** We have about 20 Virginia Certified Horticulturists on staff and we are always encouraging more to become certified. We have also had several employees as a part of the VNLA board of directors over the years. In addition to VNLA we are involved with the Hampton Roads Nursery & Landscape Association, American Nursery & Landscape Association, International Plant Propagators Society, American Camellia Society, and multiple trade shows.

**Involvement in these groups has given us the ability to stay on top of what is going on in the industry.** We get a feel for the pulse of the nursery economy, understand important legislative issues, find out about new technology, and form lasting friendships. We have also learned a lot from research and get to know the who's who to talk to when we have problems.

**Research has been a huge benefit of being part of these organizations.** Not only do we benefit from the results, we have had the opportunity to be the trial site for many research projects. We are currently part of Virginia Tech research including a water-borne pathogen study with Dr. Chuan Hong, soil moisture sensor network trials with Dr. Jim Owen, and insect control research with Dr. Pete Schultz.

**We continue into the future by constantly looking at how we operate and what we can do better.** Technology has been important as we are regularly upgrading hardware and software and are moving more and more towards mobile computing in the field. We have an in-house IT administrator that keeps us going and develops new capabilities for our computer system. We are already doing order entry and monitoring key crops on iPhones. Technology is allowing our employees to accomplish more and allowing us to keep staffing at a minimum.



**Matt Sawyer is Vice President of Operations at Bennett's Creek.** He and his wife Lauren live in Suffolk, Virginia. Matt graduated from Nansemond Suffolk Academy (high school) in Suffolk and Averett University in 2002 in Danville, Virginia where he was honored as a Trustee's Scholar.

**Organizations that he has been active** in are the ANLA Landscape Distribution Board from 2008 to present; Bennett's Creek Sertoma member from 2012 to present and the VNLA Board from 2007 to present where he is now president of the VNLA.

**Matt says that his best habit** is organization but his worst habit is procrastination. His favorite plant is the Colorado blue spruce but dislikes Liriope and other overused plants.

He also feels that employees need to be listened to the ask questions and help them to solve their own issues.

Matt feels that they have been in business for so long because they are always changing. Whether they are adding new locations, new products, updating technology or updating processes, there is always change happening.

**Their biggest challenge** that he feels they are facing is dealing with the economy. He feels that the biggest

upcoming trend is technology such as apps for plant identification.

**Matt's hobbies** are aviation, photography, snowboarding, and scuba diving. The best idea that he ever stole was a mobile display vehicle. The best advice that he ever received was to read regularly. His most significant mentor has been his father. "He has given me opportunities and guidance to grow in his business".

*Edited by Sandy Miller*

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### **Legislative- Lighthouse National Issues**

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Following the November elections, all eyes shifted to the various federal agencies that are busy developing the rules, regulations, and guidance to implement Obamacare. While

many business owners were hoping for repeal under a Romney administration, election results have dashed those hopes. However, even with a new administration, it would have been extraordinarily difficult to overcome the 60 votes that would have been needed to get almost anything through the U.S. Senate and, thus, provided virtually no path for the repeal of Obamacare. But perhaps there is still a possibility for at least a little refinement. Time will tell.

Meanwhile, green industry business owners are wondering what to do and how to prepare as the law takes effect. For certain, our industry faces special challenges. Much of our workforce is seasonal. Frankly, much of our workforce is believed to be unauthorized. Immigration reform is a necessary ingredient to successful health care reform, but let's save that conversation for another day.



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