



30th Annual New York ReLeaf Conference
July 20–22, 2023
Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY

*Keeping Trees in Mind: Planning for a
Better Tomorrow*



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



NEW YORK STATE
URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL



Welcome to the 2023 ReLeaf Conference!

Keeping Trees in Mind: Planning for a Better Tomorrow

This year's theme is "Keeping Trees in Mind: Planning for a Better Tomorrow." Trees can fix and mitigate issues ranging from climate change to stormwater control, and including trees in all stages of community planning helps maximize their benefits. We'll hear from speakers on how to plant trees properly, factors to consider for finding the right tree for the right place, things to consider when writing tree ordinances, and more. Attendees will also have the opportunity to network and exchange ideas with leading urban forestry specialists and professionals.

Sustainability

Your conference attendee gift item is a reusable mug with a travel clip and we encourage you to use it for cold beverages during the conference (it is not rated for hot beverages!). We will be planting a tree donated by the regional conference planning committee at Hofstra's Arboretum as part of this event, and the conference planning committee will be using some of the conference proceeds to fund tree plantings in local school districts. Our food vendors have supplied paper and compostable supplies when possible. We also encourage you to utilize our buses for attending the tours and picnic.

Continuing Education Credits

Continuing education credits are available for Society of American Foresters (SAF), International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), Landscape Architects (LA), and Certified Nursery & Landscape Professionals (CNLP). Information regarding which credits have been approved for applicable presentations are available at the check-in desk and in the program details section of this brochure. Session moderators will have sign-in sheets for credits available at the end of each session. Attendees must sign in on those sheets to receive credits.

Campus Information

- A map of the campus is included in your attendee packet and is also available online at <https://www.hofstra.edu/visitors/map.html>.
- Directions to campus by car and public transit are available on Hofstra's website: <https://www.hofstra.edu/visitors/directions.html>.
- Parking will be available free-of-charge in marked parking lots at Hofstra University.

Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible State or local agency that administers the program, or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY), or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information is also available in languages other than English.

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2023 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

Please see the presentation details section for more information on each session, including available continuing education credits.

All conference events are in the Student Center (SC) building.

Thursday, July 20

1:00–3:00 p.m.	Sponsor and Vendor exhibit set up (<i>SC East Multipurpose Room</i>)
3:00–5:30 p.m.	Attendee check in (<i>SC East Multipurpose Room</i>)
1:00–3:30 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council Board Meeting (<i>SC 142</i>)
4:00–5:30 p.m.	Pre-conference activities – meet at the Registration table - Hofstra’s Bird Sanctuary walking tour - Volunteer event at Hempstead Plains – carpool to Hempstead Plains
6:00–7:00 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) Member Meeting (<i>SC 142</i>)
7:00–9:00 p.m.	Council Members Reception (<i>SC West Multipurpose Room</i>)

Friday, July 21 – Morning

7:00–8:30 a.m.	Breakfast for overnight guests (<i>SC West Multipurpose Room</i>)
7:30 a.m.	Attendee check in opens (<i>SC East Multipurpose Room</i>)
8:30 a.m.	Welcome to ReLeaf 2023! DEC Urban Forestry and NYSUFC opening remarks (<i>SC Theatre</i>)
8:45–9:30 a.m.	Keynote: “Selecting trees that thrive in urban landscapes” (<i>SC Theatre</i>) Vinnie Simeone – Director, Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park
9:30–10:00 a.m.	Keynote: “Finding the chemistry in urban forestry” (<i>SC Theatre</i>) Dan Lambe – CEO, Arbor Day Foundation
10:00–10:05 a.m.	Sponsor thank you and exhibitor introduction
10:05–10:45 a.m.	Break – please visit our exhibitors in <i>SC East Multipurpose Room</i>
10:50–11:50 a.m.	Concurrent workshop sessions
	Session A: <i>SC Plaza East 127</i> “Caring for trees in the urban environment” Richard W Gibney, RLA, ISA – President, Gibney Design Landscape Architecture PC
	Session B: <i>SC Plaza Middle 127</i> “Trees & laws & us, oh my!: the impact of tree laws on our Urban Forest” Alicia J. Ragusa – Holistic Law Practice “The Village of Garden City tee ordinances: the case for preserving our urban forest” Paul Blake – Chairman, Board of Commissioners of Cultural and Recreational Affairs, Village of Garden City
	Session C: <i>SC Plaza West 127</i> “Chemung County BRIC Grant” Kristin A. Griffiths – Deputy Director, Chemung County Emergency Management; and Dan

12:00 p.m. **Lunch** in *SC East and West Multipurpose Rooms*
Attendee check-in closes

Friday July 21 – Afternoon

1:30–2:00 p.m. Board buses for Tours 1 and 2 or break if remaining on-campus for Tour 3. Meet buses **at East Circle lot, follow signs from SC.**

2:00–4:30 p.m. Concurrent local tours. Tours 1 and 2 arrive at destinations at 2:30 p.m. and leave sites at 4:00 p.m.

Tour 1: Hempstead Plains – bus leaves promptly at 2 p.m.

Tour 2: Clark Botanic Gardens – bus leaves promptly at 2 p.m.

Tour 3: Hofstra Arboretum walking tour – meet in front of Student Center at 2 p.m.

4:30–5:00 p.m. Return from tours, break, and meet buses for transport to picnic

4:30 p.m. Busing begins for picnic at Jones Beach State Park

 Buses will leave Hofstra at 4:30, 5:00, and 5:45 p.m.

 Picnic dinner served at 6 p.m., seafood/raw bar available at 5:30 p.m.

 Return buses are at 6:45 p.m., 7:15 p.m., and 8:00 p.m.

8:00 p.m. Last bus leaves Jones Beach State Park

9:00 p.m. Dorm courtyard open for overnight guests' social hour

Saturday, July 22

7:30–8:45 a.m. Breakfast for overnight guests (*SC West Multipurpose Room*)

8:00 a.m. Overnight guest check-out opens (*SC East Multipurpose Room*)

8:30–9:30 a.m. Concurrent workshops

Session D: SC Plaza Middle 127

“Urban tree troubles? Test, don’t guess” Mina Vescera –
Extension Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk
County

Session E: SC Plaza West 127

“How to plant a tree using best management practices” Vinnie
Drzewucki – Urban Forestry and Horticulture Educator, Cornell
Cooperative Extension of Nassau County

9:30–10:00 a.m. **Break**, please visit our exhibitors

10:00–10:55 a.m. Concurrent workshops

Session F: *SC Plaza Middle 127*

“The impact of invasive trees in the urban environment” Bill Jacobs – Program Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area; and Abigail Bezruczyk – Conservation Area Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area

Session G: *SC Plaza West 127*

Hands-on tree planting demo at the Hofstra Arboretum Michael Runkel – Director of Grounds and Landscape, Hofstra University; and Joe Patrone – Assistant Director of Grounds, Hofstra University

11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Closing - *SC Theatre*

“Infrastructure innovation for urban tree health and sustainability” Nina Bassuk, PhD – Professor Emeritus, Cornell University

12:00 p.m.

Grab and go lunch available in *SC East Multipurpose Room*

(if selected during registration)

1:00 p.m.

Conference ends – Please don’t forget to fill out your evaluation.

THANK YOU and we’ll see you next year in the Capital Region!

Presentation and Tour Details

Thursday, July 20

4:00–5:30 p.m.

Pre-conference activities

- **Tour of Hofstra’s Bird Sanctuary** – meet at Registration table in *SC East Multipurpose Room* for a walking tour of the campus bird sanctuary
- **Volunteer event at Hempstead Plains** – meet at Registration table *SC East Multipurpose Room*, carpool to Hempstead Plains (5–10 minute drive) to help with invasive species removal

Friday, July 22

Keynotes

8:45–9:30 a.m.

SC Theatre

“Selecting trees that thrive in urban landscapes”

Vinnie Simeone – *Director, Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park*

Choosing the right tree for the right place in urban and suburban landscapes can be very challenging. These landscapes can be quite demanding and only certain species and varieties will prosper in these locations. Often, street trees succumb to the harsh environments along roadways or get too large for areas with limited room. This lecture will offer some exceptional deciduous and evergreen trees for urban and suburban landscapes, such as parks, traffic medians, along streets, and in naturalized areas. These are selections that will function as good alternatives to invasive species and problematic selections from the past, such as callery pear, pin oak, sweetgum, and others. The trees that will be presented will provide benefits to birds and pollinators and in some cases, provide deer resistance as well as drought, heat, and pest resistance. Also discussed will be proper planning and maintenance practices to ensure the success of these plantings, such as proper planting techniques, pruning, mulching and general aftercare.

9:30–10:00 a.m.

SC Theatre

“Finding the chemistry in urban forestry”

Dan Lambe – *Chief Executive Officer, Arbor Day Foundation*

A positive and inspiring reflection on the power and importance of the diverse constituencies that embody the urban forestry community, and how they each play a part in creating sustainable programs that make a meaningful difference in people’s lives.

Keynote Credits available: SAF: 1; CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 1.25; ISA BCMA – Science: 0.75; ISA BCMA – Management: 0.5; LA: 1

Concurrent Sessions A, B, and C

10:50–11:50 a.m. Session A (SC Plaza East 127)

“Caring for trees in the urban environment”

Richard W Gibney, RLA, ISA – *President, Gibney Design Landscape Architecture PC*

This program discusses the aspects of arboriculture in the urban community forest and will show cases of urban tree problems and solutions that address the health, safety, and welfare of residents while supporting the healthy, safe growth, and maintenance of the trees in this environment. Inventories, species diversification, pruning, planting, mulching, and storm damage are all covered in a concise manner to convey the importance of long-term success in community forest management.

Credits available: SAF: 1; CNLP: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Practice: 1; LA: 1

10:50–11:50 a.m. Session B (SC Plaza Middle 127)

“Trees & laws & us, oh my!: the impact of tree laws on our urban forest”

Alicia J. Ragusa – *Holistic Law Practice*

“The Village of Garden City tree ordinances: the case for preserving our urban forest”

Paul Blake – *Chairman, Board of Commissioners of Cultural and Recreational Affairs, Village of Garden City*

Tree ordinances are critical tools to protect a community’s urban forest, but they can be complex. Learn about tree ordinances from two points of view, and the importance of building a strong, well-thought-out ordinance to support your community’s trees and prevent future problems.

Credits available: SAF: 1; CNLP: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1

10:50–11:50 a.m. Session C (SC Plaza West 127)

“Chemung County BRIC Grant”

Kristin A. Griffiths – *Deputy Director, Chemung County Emergency Management*, and **Dan Gaidasz, ISA** – *Technical Coordinator, Urban and Community Forestry Program, NYSDEC*

The NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Program is looking to help communities become more storm resilient. We will discuss steps communities can take and introduce the *Community Forest Storm Mitigation Plan for NY Communities Workbook and Template*.

Credits available: SAF: 1; CNLP: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1

Afternoon Tours and Sessions

Tours leave Hofstra promptly at 2:00 p.m.

2:30–4:30 p.m. Hempstead Plains

Tour this remnant of the grassland prairie that once constituted Nassau County and remains home to 250 plants, including 6 state rare or endangered species.

Credits available: SAF: 1.5; CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and BCMA – Science: 2.5; LA: 2.5

2:30–4:30 p.m. Clark Botanic Gardens

Tour guide and presenter: Bonnie Lynn Klein, MAEE, CNLP – *Horticulturalist, Town of North Hempstead*

The Clark family purchased the 12-acre property in Nassau County in the mid-1920s, when it was simply farmland. Now owned and operated by the Town of North Hempstead in cooperation with Fanny Dwight Clark Memorial Garden, Inc., Clark Botanic Garden is a living museum and educational facility, dedicated to understanding and appreciating the world's plant life through horticulture, education, and research. Collections at the garden include native species, conifers, roses, perennials, daylilies, wetland plants, rock garden plants, herbs, pollinator plants, and over a dozen collections of plant families.

Credits available: SAF: 1.5; CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and BCMA – Science: 2.5; LA: 2.5

2:00–4:30 p.m. Tour 3 – Hofstra Arboretum Walking Tour

Tour guide and presenter: Michael Runkel – *Director of Grounds and Landscape, Hofstra University*

Take a guided walk through the Hofstra's Arboretum, which spans the University's 240-acre campus, viewing some of Hofstra's most valued trees and landscape. During the tour, we will discuss our campus tree management efforts, including plant selection, pruning, IPM, and fertilization programs.

Credits available: SAF: 1.5; CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and BCMA – Science: 2.5; LA: 2.5

Saturday, July 23

Concurrent Sessions D and E

8:30–9:30 a.m. Session D (*SC Plaza West 127*)

“Urban tree troubles? Test, don't guess”

Mina Vescera – *Extension Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County*

Similarity in symptoms between abiotic and biotic causal agents can make diagnosing tree issues challenging. Don't do it alone! This presentation will review site assessment when encountering a troubled tree and how to collect samples for accurate diagnoses from local experts.

Credits available: SAF: 0.5; CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal specialist, and BCMA – Science: 1.25; LA: 1.25

8:30–9:30 a.m. Session E (*SC Plaza Middle 127*)

“How to plant a tree using best management practices”

Vinnie Drzewucki – *Urban Forestry and Horticulture Educator - Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County*

We will review best management practices for tree planting, which include proper tree selection, determining root depth, proper handling, planting technique, and how to care for a newly planted tree for successful establishment.

Credits available: SAF: 0.5; CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Practice: 1.25; LA: 1.25

Concurrent Sessions F and G

10:00–10:55 a.m.

Session F (*SC Plaza West 127*)

“The impact of invasive trees in the urban environment”

Bill Jacobs – *Program Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area*, and **Abigail Bezruczyk** – *Conservation Area Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area*

In this presentation, LIISMA staff will highlight the impact of non-native trees on our landscapes. A discussion on identifying problematic tree species, such as tree of heaven, black locust, Japanese tree lilac, and callery pear, will be followed by a discussion of restrictions and strategies for their management. Other invasive species issues related to trees will also be discussed, such as managing invasive vines to protect trees, understanding spotted lanternfly, and updates on beech leaf disease.

Credits available: SAF: 1; CNLP: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Science: 1; LA: 1

10:00–10:55 a.m.

Session G (*SC Plaza Middle 127*)

“Hands-on tree planting demo at the Hofstra Arboretum”

Michael Runkel – *Director of Grounds and Landscape, Hofstra University*, and **Joe Patrone** – *Assistant Director of Grounds, Hofstra University*

A hands-on demonstration of proper tree-planting techniques, including how large to dig the hole, setting the proper planting depth, removal of the cage and burlap, and creation of tree well and mulching.

Credits available: SAF 1; CNLP: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Practice: 1; LA: 1

Closing Session

11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

SC Theatre

“Infrastructure innovation for urban tree health and sustainability”

Nina Bassuk, PhD – *Professor Emeritus, Cornell University*

In every urban area, we constantly respond to construction and development in the landscape, whether it is a new building, a road, or parking lot. Through the process of construction, soils inevitably get trashed! Compaction crushes pores that prevent drainage and create dense soils that cannot be accessed by plant roots. In this talk, Dr. Bassuk will discuss the reasons why plants often fail when planted near new developments and highlight several strategies for modifying soils to allow roots to grow.

Credits available: SAF: 1; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1; LA: 1

Speaker Bios

Thank you to all our speakers who make the conference possible by sharing their knowledge with us!

Keynotes

Dan Lambe – Chief Executive Officer, Arbor Day Foundation

Dan Lambe has committed nearly two decades of work to helping solve some of the biggest issues facing people and the planet through trees. After being named CEO in 2022 after 19 years in leadership roles at the Arbor Day Foundation, Lambe launched an initiative to accelerate the nonprofit's impact by planting 500 million trees with a focus on forests and neighborhoods of greatest need.



Dan Lambe

Lambe is a trusted thought leader in the sustainable forestry space and he regularly speaks at conferences hosted by the United Nations, Sustainable Brands, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and other high-profile industry events where trees and climate intersect. Lambe is also frequently used as a resource for top news outlets and has been featured on The Weather Channel, CNN, Forbes, Fast Company, and NPR. Lambe is the author of the book, *Now Is the Time for Trees*, and even helped set a Guinness World Record for most people watering plants simultaneously.

Vinnie Simeone – Director, Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park

Vincent has worked in the horticultural field for over 37 years. He is currently the Director of Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park in Oyster Bay, New York, where he has worked for 31 years. He received an AAS degree in ornamental horticulture from Farmingdale State College (SUNY) and a BS in ornamental horticulture from the University of Georgia, and he also obtained a Master's in Public Administration from C.W. Post- Long Island University in 2003. Vincent has specialized expertise in woody plant identification, culture, use, and the selection of superior varieties. For the past 30 years, Vincent has worked in public horticulture and manages Planting Fields Arboretum on Long Island. For over two decades, Vincent taught horticulture classes at the New York Botanical Garden and Farmingdale State College. He has authored seven books on gardening and received awards from the Long Island Nursery and Landscape Association, Farmingdale State College, and the NYS ISA chapter.

Closing

Nina Bassuk, PhD – Professor Emeritus, Cornell University

Nina Bassuk has been a professor and program leader of the Urban Horticulture Institute at Cornell University for the past 42 years. She is on the Board of Directors of the New York State Urban Forestry Council and is a co-author of *Trees in the Urban Landscape*, a text for landscape architects and horticultural practitioners on establishing trees in disturbed and urban landscapes. In addition, Dr. Bassuk has authored over 150 papers on the physiological problems of plants growing in urban environments, including improved plant selections for difficult sites; soil modification, including the development of "CU-Structural Soil"; and improved transplanting technology. She works closely with municipalities to help implement best practices in urban forestry management. Now retired, Nina continues to conduct research on woody plants—especially hybrid oaks—and engages in outreach activities.

Speakers

Abigail Bezruczyk – Conservation Area Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area

Abby Bezruczyk is LIISMA's Conservation Area Manager. She received her B.S. in environmental science from Cornell University, where she studied invasive plant-soil interactions. She brings experience in science communications from her work as communications coordinator for the New York Invasive Species Research Institute. Her work with North Shore Land Alliance gave Abby her start in stewardship and invasive species management on Long Island.



Abigail Bezruczyk

Paul Blake – Chairman, Board of Commissioners of Cultural and Recreational Affairs, Village of Garden City

Paul has worked in the field of Recreation and Parks since 1971, beginning as a part-time Recreation Attendant, and holding numerous jobs through the years, including as Superintendent of Recreation in Garden City from 1994 to early 2001. After leaving Garden City in 2001, Paul worked for the Town of North Hempstead as a Deputy Commissioner of Parks. He held this title until he took retirement in 2010.



Paul Blake

Paul operated a successful training and consulting firm from 2010 until spring 2019, when he was hired as a consultant by Garden City to assist in the operation of the Recreation Department while a new Parks Commissioner was sought. After several months as a consultant, Paul was encouraged to apply for the Parks Commissioner job, and after an extensive search and interview procedure, was hired as the Commissioner in October 2019.

Vinnie Drzewucki – Urban Forestry and Horticulture Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County

Vinnie Drzewucki is a professional educator with more than 40 years of work experience in the arboricultural, landscape, and nursery industries. Currently, he is an Urban and Community Forestry and Horticulture Educator at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County, educating consumers, landscape, tree care professionals, and municipality leaders and staff. His education includes Ornamental Horticulture and Business degrees from Farmingdale State College, SUNY College at Old Westbury, and Adelphi University. An ISA Certified Arborist and NYSNLA Senior Lifetime Certified Nursery and Landscape Professional, he has served on business association boards, including LINLA and NYSNLA, and is currently a director with NYSUFC and LIAA. "Connecting people, plants and nature is what it's all about," says Vinnie, who lives in East Northport, NY and loves to fish the inshore and offshore waters of Long Island and travel the world.



Vinnie Drzewucki

Dan Gaidasz, ISA – Technical Coordinator, NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Program

Dan has worked at DEC for over 22 years. He started his career working with private landowners, providing stewardship advice, and working with nonprofits, volunteers, and local communities to help enhance their urban forestry programs. As Technical Coordinator for the Urban and Community Forestry Program, Dan gets to work with a great team helping communities across New York improve their urban forests. Throughout his career, Dan has been a part of several emergency responses from wildfires, storms, and other environmental disasters. He is also part of a national Strike Team available to help communities recover from storm events. With this experience, Dan and the Urban and Community Forestry team hope to grow greater storm resiliency in communities across New York.



Dan Gaidasz

Richard W Gibney, RLA, ISA – President, Gibney Design Landscape Architecture PC

Richard W Gibney holds a BS degree in Landscape Architecture (Cornell University '81) and an AAS degree in Ornamental Horticulture (SUNY Farmingdale '78). He is a licensed landscape architect registered in New York since 1986 and a consulting ISA Certified Arborist since 1991. In addition to providing landscape architecture services, Richard Gibney established Gibney Design Group Inc. in 1989 to provide arboricultural consultation services and horticultural education in the form of lectures and seminars. In 2009, Richard W Gibney, RLA and Gibney Design Group Inc. combined to form Gibney Design Landscape Architecture PC. The website is www.gibneydesigngroup.com. In 2014, the website www.gibneyCE.com was created to provide educational credits to landscape architects and ISA Certified Arborists. It is approved by ASLA, ISA, and in New Jersey and North Carolina. Also, in 2014, Richard received the True Professionals Award from the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).



Richard W Gibney

Kristin A. Griffiths – Deputy Director, Chemung County Emergency Management-Planning Department

Kristin has worked for Chemung County for 28 years, 27 of them spent in the roles of Emergency Management and Employee Health and Safety. She authored the BRIC Grant application that was awarded funding to create a County Tree Mitigation Program. She is currently leading this important mitigation project with the assistance of Dan Gaidasz, NYSDEC and with significant input from Environmental Science professors and students at Elmira College. She is also a Certified Pesticide Applicator.



Kristin A. Griffiths

Bill Jacobs – Program Manager, Long Island Invasive Species Management Area

Bill serves as the Program Manager of LIISMA, hosted by the Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI), under contract with NYSDEC. Bill has a MS Degree in Forest Resources Management from SUNY ESF and more than 30 years of experience in conservation.



Bill Jacobs

Bonnie Lynn Klein – Horticulturalist, Town of North Hempstead

As the Horticulturist for the Town of North Hempstead, Bonnie has focused on restoring the magical Clark Botanic Garden in Albertson, where she is the director of grounds and programming. She also works with all supervisors of the parks in the town on grounds planting and maintenance, sports fields, and tree assessment throughout the Town.

Bonnie holds a master's in Agriculture, Extension Education, bachelor's in finance, and an associate's in Ornamental Horticulture. She has strong knowledge in entomology, plant pathology, plants selection, IPM, and diagnostics. She is a Certified Nursery and Landscape Professional and previously employed as the Master Gardener Volunteer Program Coordinator and Horticulture Extension Educator for Cornell Cooperative Extension Nassau County, where she helped form the East Meadow Farm Demonstration Gardens and Community Garden. She is currently an Associate Professor at Farmingdale State College, on the Farmingdale Horticulture Committee, and Curricula Advisor for the Department of Urban Horticulture and Design at Farmingdale State College. She is a member on the board of the Long Island Gold Medal Plants Committee. Bonnie's passion for community and plants is what drives her to be a strong steward for our public gardens and parks.

Alicia J. Ragusa – Holistic Law Practice

Alicia J. Ragusa is an attorney and conservationist with a focus on environmental advocacy. She was featured in a New York Times article, “In Lieu of the Lorax, Citizens Speak for the Trees” (July 13, 2008), which reported on her activism. Ms. Ragusa was a member of the USDA Forest Service’s Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project (STEW-MAP) Working Group. She is the founder of TreeLove, a happening aimed at fostering appreciation for urban forestry and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the New York State Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC).



Alicia Ragusa

Michael Runkel – Director of Grounds & Landscape, Hofstra University

Michael Runkel has been an active member of the green industry on Long Island for the past 15 years. He currently serves as Director of Grounds and Landscape at Hofstra University. As Director, he is responsible for all maintenance tasks, storm response, and all capital landscape improvements on Hofstra’s 250-acre campus. Prior to Joining Hofstra in November 2019, he worked for the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation system as Landscape Curator at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum and Assistant Director/Director of Horticulture at Planting Field Arboretum. Michael graduated from Farmingdale State College in May 2012 with a Bachelor’s of Technology in Horticulture Technology Management with an emphasis in Landscape Development.

Mina Vescera – Extension Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County

Mina Vescera is the Nursery and Landscape Specialist for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. She serves Long Island’s horticultural professionals by coordinating educational programming and assisting with plant health care issues through research and consultations.

Conference Coordinator

Christina McLaughlin is the NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Partnership Coordinator, in which she oversees the ReLeaf program and coordinates the annual conference. She started with DEC in 2016 as an environmental educator with the summer camps program and joined the UCF program in May 2019. Prior to joining DEC, Christina was an analytical chemist in pharmaceutical research for 5 years and then Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station in Rensselaerville, NY for 4 years, where she started as a Student Conservation Association intern and taught students of all ages, developed programs, coordinated with teachers and school groups, and created a volunteer program. She has a Bachelor’s of Science in Zoology from SUNY Oswego and a Master’s in Biodiversity Conservation and Policy from SUNY Albany, where her thesis was on public knowledge of invasive species.



Christina McLaughlin

Conference Ads

Please be sure to visit our
sponsors and exhibitors in
*SC East Multipurpose
Room.*



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DAVID AND JEANNE RYAN

Be in the know!

Be the first to hear about upcoming events, subscribe to the DEC monthly newsletter “Plants Trees and Land Conservation”: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/NYSDEC/subscriber/new?topic_id=NYSDEC_22

Sign up for the NYS Urban Forestry Council’s monthly newsletter, “Taking Root,” by clicking the subscribe link on the right-hand side: www.nysufc.org

See you in 2024 in the Capital Region!