What’s Growin’ On?
Horticulture & Crop Science Department

From Internships to Careers
Learn. Do. Lead.
At Cal Poly you
Learn by Doing.

In HCS you
Learn. Do. Lead.
Dear Alumni and Friends,

The federal government has pledged to create five million “green” jobs over the next 10 years. Despite a slowing economy, a large percentage of the U.S. work force continues to dedicate itself to the environment. Landscape technician jobs are expected to grow by 20 percent in the next decade, a faster than average growth rate according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The jobs outlook for landscape construction managers boasts a 17 percent growth rate, and if you want to work in conservation or agricultural science, there is still job growth projected over the next 10 years.

When we surveyed our current students this year about why they came to Cal Poly, their number one reason was “Cal Poly could provide me with the best education for my career.” That is why we’re devoting this issue of What’s Growin’ On to the careers of some of our HCS graduates. From interns to managers to business owners, they have real-world experience they can impart to our current students. They do so each fall quarter in the HCS 110 Orientation class I teach, where alumni who work in each of our department’s seven concentrations tell students about what they do, and what students could do.

As our students embark on their careers with internships either at home or abroad (see “Internships Go International” p.18), they can look to our alumni both as inspiration but also as sources of employment. Our annual Evening with Industry brings employers to campus to meet with our students, and many of the employers are alumni themselves (see “From Internships to Careers” p.6). This event is popular with students because it gives them a chance to explore the many job and internship opportunities available to them in a friendly and supportive environment. The tri-tip cooked and served in the Hort Unit greenhouse is a big draw, too!

Our alumni also have valuable lessons to share with other alumni, whether it is surviving the Great Recession as a business owner, managing all the green spaces at a luxury resort, the challenges of growing artichokes and other vegetables in the Salinas valley...our alumni are doing it all, and doing it well (read about “Career Trajectory,” starting on p.6).

Each year we also have the opportunity for HCS alumni to visit campus and see “what’s growin’ on” for themselves at an alumni weekend. We hope you will join us for this annual event next spring. It is a wonderful time for me to talk with you and introduce you to our faculty and students who make this such a great department.

Warm regards,

Dr. John C. Peterson
Department Head and Professor
Horticulture and Crop Science Department

“From interns to managers to business owners, [our HCS graduates] have real-world experience they can impart to our current students.”
Dr. Keith Patterson retired this year after teaching at Cal Poly for 16 years. Patterson taught classes in viticulture and fruit science, and was instrumental in helping to launch the college’s first interdepartmental major, wine and viticulture. “Because of his many years of unflagging service to the wine grape industry he will be sorely missed, so he is keeping busy even in retirement,” commented Dr. John Peterson. Patterson will be bringing his expertise to Allen Hancock College, teaching Viticulture II, an advanced course covering the many aspects of vineyard management. Specifically, Patterson said he will teach advanced students how to troubleshoot problems with grape vines and introduce them to some of the sustainability issues that affect the wine industry. In addition to teaching, Patterson remains a consultant for wineries on the Central Coast. Besides keeping his hand in growing grapes, making wine and of course, drinking it, Patterson will have more time to enjoy his other interests: golf, camping and vegetable gardening.

Lecturer Joseph Haslett received a $1,000 award from the Al & Rose Amaral Agricultural Enterprise Program Endowment for providing outstanding learning opportunities for students through Cal Poly Corporation-supported enterprises, namely the Interior Plant Care Program. “I am happy to report that Joseph’s innovative leadership of our foliage and plantscape enterprises is noticed and appreciated,” said Dr. Mark Shelton, Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture, Food & Environmental Sciences.
Landscape architect Melanie Mills is teaching three landscape design courses for the HCS Department. Mills is a Low Impact Development Specialist who will emphasize landscape sustainability with her students. With 10 years of experience working in the field of landscape architecture and an additional six years in land conservation and community development, Mills’ students are drawing inspiration from her diverse background and technical skills. Her landscape architectural work focuses on the creation of high performance landscapes where low impact development systems are an integral feature. “Melanie has considerable experience working on interdisciplinary teams to incorporate ecological sustainability and function into urban areas,” said Dr. John Peterson, “and is a wonderful addition to our department.” Mills also works for the Low Impact Development Initiative (centralcoastlidi.org) and is a principal in m + o architecture, a firm which fuses advanced sustainable technology, historic preservation, and community and regional place-making.

Since 1996 the interiorscape industry’s most distinguished leaders have been recognized by induction into the Interior Plantscape Hall of Fame. The award was established to honor individuals of integrity whose personal dedication provided great leadership in the development and growth of the interiorscape. This year, Dr. John Peterson was inducted into the Plant Industry Alliance’s (PIA) Hall of Fame. “We are honored to induct Dr. Peterson into the Interior Plantscape Hall of Fame as the 2012 Allied Trade Inductee,” says PIA, “and recognize him for enhancing the public’s appreciation for plants and the environment, and making it enjoyable for so many people.”

Watch a video about Peterson’s career at tinyurl.com/9nk9eom.
The Organic Farm has moved its vegetable processing center to a temporary space in the Crops Unit Building 17. The HCS Department is planning for a new processing center near Highland Drive that would be adequate for processing both organic and non-organic fruits and vegetables. The Organic Farm scaled down their production volume this year, which allows them to take better care of their crops and work them in a more sustainable manner. Other than that, no major changes this year at the Crops Unit and our adjacent fields reports Crops Technician Launnie Ginn. “We had a very dry winter which kept our disease problems low and most of our crops have done well this year.”

On the retail side, with a good crop of avocados waiting to be harvested, the market is down so “we are holding out a little longer hoping the prices will kick up soon. It looks like we have a good fruit set for next year’s crop also.” Citrus have produced well this year and the price was high so Crops marketed all their Valencia oranges, which had suffered a flat market the last few years. “Overall, the crops and fields are looking very good and the students, under the guidance of their faculty advisors, are doing a good job this year,” affirmed Ginn.

The HCS Department was the first department chosen to be recognized for its long service to the Future Farmers of America (FFA) judging program. All those advising contests within the HCS Department were thanked. “A very nice tribute to the Horticulture and Crop Science Department,” said Dr. Joe Sabol. “Those 2,000 FFA members and their advisors know there is an active Hort and Crops Department at Cal Poly that cares about their future!”

The Floral Design Team was invited by Florists Review magazine to contribute arrangement ideas to “Sea to Shining Sea,” in the fifth biennial trend forecast for floral professionals. While the nautical look has been standard fare in coastal regions for some time, it is only recently that this water-born style has swept all 50 states,” the magazine explained. With blue, green and neutral colors, delphiniums, larkspurs and sea holly, driftwood and coral, the arrangements featured a new aquatic style.

The road to the new Poly Canyon Village right below the Hort Unit exposed the backside of the area, requiring significant work at the Hort Unit to make it an attractive site as students drive or walk to their dorms. Last year a new amphitheater and dry creek bed were built over the summer. This year the landscaping continued, with terracing and planting below Lab 2 pesticide labs and in an easterly direction, incorporating Drumm Creek into the Hort Unit for native plant display. Students removed mulberry and worked on water run-off issues. They planted trees in the terraces that will

Left to right: Virginia Walter, Launnie Ginn, Dr. Jason Lewis, Dr. Robert Shortell, Dr. John Peterson receive FFA award.
get the bonsai treatment to keep them low enough to create a screen for the buildings but not obstruct the views. A spiral pathway system now winds through the student-designed landscape areas called Amatoscapes. Students are growing more Mediterranean plants in the nursery area and revamping the irrigation system. Run-off trials are underway in lined wooden boxes so that water can be collected and drained, collected and treated, or collected and used. In the Leaning Pine Arboretum, they are testing herbicides that will kill the kikuyu and Bermuda grasses but avoid the drought tolerant carex grass. The new All-America Selections (AAS) Display Garden was a riot of summer color, where AAS winners that are the top-rated plants available in the U.S. for this region were grown and displayed.

This year, the second Cal Poly Cup was held at Olivas Links in Oxnard, Calif. The first competition was held 10 years earlier in Goleta between six Cal Poly Pomona and six Cal Poly San Luis Obispo students enrolled in the respective turf programs. The competition between the two campus rivals ended with Cal Poly SLO taking the title. Chris Bunnell (OH ‘84) of Crop Production Services decided far too much time had passed since the first Cal Poly Cup was held and started work on resurrecting the competition. With the help of the current turf professors, Jason Lewis from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Kelly Parkins at Cal Poly Pomona, the student teams were put together. Chris enlisted the help of several superintendents that had actually played in the original Cal Poly Cup such as Jeff Miller (OH ‘95), as well as several other superintendent alumni. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo walked away with a second victory (above right).

In addition to enjoying a little competition between the two schools, the sponsor’s intent was to give the students a forum to interact with superintendents that were in their same position 10 years earlier. The event allowed the students to meet superintendents from various parts of Southern California, inquire about possible job opportunities, and to ask advice on what to do and not do in their quest to become a superintendent. (See their “Words of Wisdom,” p.20.) Participating superintendents had the opportunity to meet and greet the new talent coming out of our California turf programs and possibly have first pick at a potential crew member. A special thank you goes to Syngenta and Crop Production Services for sponsoring the event and Matt Mulvany (EHS ’84), the director of agronomy at Olivas Links.

The HCS Department experienced a surge in student acceptances for fall 2012, with an increase of approximately 10 percent. “This puts us on a clear upswing for our HCS Department,” said Department Head Dr. John Peterson, congratulating faculty and staff on their help with recruitment, which included calling accepted students and special events geared to high school and community college students. “Our efforts seem to be working!”

This past June, Crystal Weitkamp (MS ’08) was anxiously taking care of pre-wedding tasks, when two days before her wedding, she discovered the delivery date for her flower shipment was set for the wrong date. “I nearly passed out,” she said and frantically called her sister, Keri Livingston, floriculture specialist at the Horticulture Unit. “I have no flowers, no bouquets, no centerpieces and it’s two days before my wedding!” Keri calmly replied, “Let me make a few calls.” Ten minutes later Poly Plant Shop was able to locate beautiful roses from a local rose grower and have them cut, bundled and ready for pick up. “I was overjoyed that Poly Plant Shop was able to help on such short notice,” Weitkamp enthused. “Thank you, Poly Plant Shop, for saving my wedding.”

FALL 2012 NEWSLETTER 5
Career Trajectory

From Internships to Careers

“Internships are key to figuring out what you want to do,” says Chris Drew (CS ’01). Now the production manager at Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville, Calif., he interned at Headstart Nursery in Gilroy, Calif., a grower of vegetable transplants, ornamental plugs and liners. “There are so many avenues you can go down,” naming PCA (pest control advisor), sales and information technology as just a few of the career paths that a concentration in crop science can offer.

Adds Jon Singley (CS ’81), owner of Blue Spruce Landscape and Construction, “I’ve seen interns get so interested in what we were doing that it totally changed their career path.”

“We highly recommend our students pursue at least one of the multiple internship possibilities through Cal Poly,” says Department Head Dr. John Peterson. “Not only do students get important real world experience, but internships often lead to jobs.”

Every spring, Evening with Industry brings leading professionals and company owners to meet Cal Poly students to discuss jobs as well as internships. Company representatives briefly introduce themselves and their company before dinner starts. During the meal that follows, students sit at a company’s table to have some individual, direct conversations. The department encourages students to visit with a number of companies during the course of the evening — a little like speed-dating for hort and crops.

“I had a summer internship with O’Connell Landscape Management in Southern California, and I worked in the fields with crews and account managers to really understand the green industry,” says Nicole Spencer (EHS ’08). She is now a project manager for BellaVista Landscape Services. Drew adds, “It’s hard to supervise a job you don’t know how to do!”
Evening with Industry has a decade-long history of bringing students and potential employees together. Jim Tracy, the chief operating officer of Park West Companies, attended Evening with Industry for the first time this year. “I was very impressed by the staff, faculty and especially the students,” he said. “Cal Poly continues to do an excellent job of educating and developing the students and we have already reached out to four of them to hopefully bring us together.”

Companies are quick to point out to students the things that make their company and industry unique and attractive, whether it’s being in an expansion mode, being vertically integrated or having a history of mentoring new employees. Andy Magnasco (EHS ‘09) enthused about employer Carmel Valley Ranch, “This is the perfect place for Cal Poly interns because there are so many types of things for them to do — in vineyards, working with bees, landscaping — there is so much detail that we’re working on so we can get better and learn more every day.”

Even unpaid internships have benefits such as working with industry professionals. “They will bring you into everything that they do and freely share what they know,” Analisia Basurto (AEPS ‘13) says admiringly of her supervisors at Wisley Gardens in Ripley, England. “They are all highly educated horticulturists or individuals with years and years of experience.”

Paramount Citrus is proud of the relationship and intern program it has with Cal Poly, says President David Krause. “Early on in our efforts to launch Paramount’s program we were lucky enough to catch the attention of Dr. Lauren Garner. She became an invaluable resource and advocate, and we wouldn’t be nearly as successful without the support and sponsorship of faculty such as Dr. Garner.” A high percentage of Paramount’s internships are filled by Cal Poly students, many of these leading to full-time employment. “Cal Poly alumni represent the growing talent pool within our business and the next generation of senior management,” continues Krause. “Cal Poly’s Learn by Doing motto is highly successful. We look forward to many more Cal Poly interns over the next decade.”

“The recruiting that we’ve done through Cal Poly has been great,” confirms Matt Moore (EHS ’06), also of BellaVista Landscape Services in San Jose, Calif. “We’ve met some really interesting and fun students. In fact, everybody that works here in terms of the management team is a Cal Poly alum!”

If your company is interested in attending the next Evening with Industry, email aeps@calpoly.edu.

The HCS Department recommends students pursue at least one of the many internship opportunities available to them.
An Intern’s Life in a Public Garden: The Best Job in the World

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, Filoli is a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Formerly a grand 654-acre country place, Filoli is operated today as a public garden, cultural center and nature center. It was built in 1917 as the country estate for Mr. and Mrs. William Bowers Bourn II and has a 16-acre formal English Renaissance-style garden as well as original elements from a “gentleman’s estate,” an orchard, agricultural fields and oak woodlands.

Under the supervision of a horticulturist, interns learn techniques of planting, watering, hedging, fertilizing, mowing and pruning, with two-week rotations in five garden areas. They are also taught to operate power equipment, use hand tools and are required to learn garden and greenhouse plants, weeds and native plants. A test on these subjects completes the 10-week program.

“Sometimes gardening can be a ‘moving meditation’ ...”
As part her internship, Hallie Schmidt (EHS ‘13) kept a daily journal of her activities. “At the end of each week (or when I feel inspired),” she said, “I write an overview of my experience and thoughts about everything.” Below are excerpts from her weeks at Filoli.

WEEK 1: I am already thoroughly enjoying this internship program. I appreciate that my lead trusts me to do more specialized tasks like pruning or mowing. Because I am given good direction I feel that I have been doing well with the tasks assigned to me. I am also performing regular tasks more quickly and with more confidence as I become comfortable with them. For example, I watered pots and coiled hoses much more quickly on Friday than I did Monday. On my second day of pruning azaleas I felt my approach and finished product improved. I appreciated the power tools workshops as I haven’t had a great deal of experience. The fine-cut mower makes me a little nervous, but I don’t think we’ll be using that here anyway. I wish I could drive a tractor…guess I’ll have to save that for the tractor class at Cal Poly.

WEEK 2: Just as I get used to an area it’s my last day! I do like that I get to spend time in each area and with only a 10-week program, two weeks is generous.

I’m beginning to notice myself go through different energy levels throughout the day. For example, I will be doing an activity like weeding, and I am dragging. It takes a lot of physical and mental effort to do a good job. And then, after break, I will be plowing through the beds, doing an effective job without even thinking. I wish I knew how to always be in that high-energy positive state.

Interns stay with local families and do garden work in exchange for the hospitality. Going into this I already knew that I wouldn’t be looking forward to the extra garden work after a full week of gardening. I am grateful for this opportunity that has saved me from having to arrange and pay for local housing for the summer. However, I think it would be ideal for interns to live together, on the Filoli property if possible. Since we don’t ever work together during the day we don’t really get to bond much and I feel we’re missing out. Even doing yard work together after work would be better than doing it alone.

WEEK 3: I really like doing irrigation work because I feel that it takes problem solving and thinking. I do love gardening, but I also like to be mentally challenged. Sometimes gardening can be a “moving meditation” as Dave Lesser calls it, which is good. Irrigation, however, is like a moving puzzle for which you have to use critical thinking and observation. I also know that water is a huge issue in California, so being an auditor, or any job with water use, will have demand and possibly good money in the future. I will definitely consider this possibility. I don’t mind getting wet…in the summer anyway.

WEEK 4: Once again, I’m sad to be leaving this garden area. I really enjoy all the flowers for cutting.
They have a nice effect with all the different patches of color around the garden. I think they are much nicer than roses, but people do love roses so they are an inevitable part of public gardening. I would really like to be part of flower arranging, either here at Filoli or in the future.

WEEK 5: Working in the greenhouse is a total change of scenery compared to the past two weeks in the garden. I’m definitely enjoying it, which is surprising to me because after my nursery internship last summer I decided I wasn’t into the nursery scene. It seems like a more social work environment because everyone is close together and there are more people working here. Also, I’m learning a totally new set of garden techniques (watering pots, propagation, interior plant care, greenhouse environmental controls, etc.).

One thing I found interesting was the biological controls being used in the greenhouses. In an effort to move away from pesticide sprays the staff is experimenting with introducing beneficial insects into the greenhouse environment and soil. So far I know there are good nematodes (that eat the larvae of fungus gnats) and lacewings. There are also some botanical helpers: marigolds and peppers, whose pollen is apparently helpful. Cool, huh?

At the end of the day I was having trouble with my wrist/forearm. I was doing a lot of hand-sewing and pruning over the weekend, plus holding the pruners while taking cuttings. Add holding the hose and I must have overworked it. I tried to do more cuttings in the afternoon but my hand was shaking and I wasn’t nearly as efficient as before. So I cleaned the greenhouse instead. I’m hoping tomorrow it will be back to normal. I like taking cuttings!

WEEK 6: I got a history of renovations of Area Two from Matt. The area has undergone a lot of change since he began there about five years ago and it sounds like there’s more to come (removal of the rose garden, planting bulbs, renovating boxwood hedges and yews, moving from chemical to organic fertilizing, planned removal of the Sunburst Honey Locust and olive trees, etc.) Along with that, he explained to me the evolving goals of Filoli garden, as in practical vs. traditional, botanic garden vs. original specimen plants, various visions vs. the original architect’s vision for the property. It’s an interesting thing for a public garden institution to consider, especially in the case of a historic national trust.
My initial reaction was to introduce a variety of new plants and design ideas (I love Protea and a “Native California English garden” would be an interesting challenge and demonstration for patrons) but I definitely see the benefit and reason to maintain a historic garden in the state it was originally planted and planned. There are numerous famous landscape architects. To change the plants and themes in a historic garden would be like modernizing or updating a Frank Lloyd Wright home. It would no longer be his piece and would not reflect history or the artist’s design accurately.

However, I do think changes in the cultural practices are appropriate, especially at Filoli where a lot of the traditional methods are still maintained. For example, I’m glad underground irrigation has been installed and I think it’s great that Filoli is making the move to using organic fertilizers and on-site composting in lieu of chemical fertilizers. Still, tradition is preserved, especially in the greenhouse area where the original greenhouses, cold frames and even wood cutting boxes are still used. Overall, this is an interesting topic of debate.

WEEK 7: I had a plant problems workshop and walk with Dave Lesser [Filoli horticulturist]. Dave is an interesting guy and it seemed to me that his main goal was to encourage us to observe the world around us in more detail than we are accustomed to doing. Having these skills will make us better diagnosticians of plant problems and also better storytellers and observers in general.

Something he said at the beginning of the talk stuck with me: the idea of gardeners being seen as “glorified janitors.” I see this perspective, and from all the general labor we do I can feel it, too. However, in the case of plant problems, there is a step up in the respect people give (and the amount they will pay for consulting).

After our walk I feel more confident in identifying thrips and fire blight and the weevil that likes Rosaceae plants. I was already interested in becoming a certified arborist and this workshop got me even more motivated to do so. Just as with irrigation, I like the critical thinking and diagnostics that plant problems entail. Although pests and fungi and diseases gross me out more than water in pipes, I still find it interesting and could see myself doing this for a living, especially with trees. Trees are such majestic, revered, incredible structures of life and spending my work day around and up in them, sick or well, would be wonderful.

WEEK 8: I’ve always been interested in compost so the combination of this with the soil science class I just took during the winter made a lot of the concepts easier to grasp in the composting workshop. Still, I have never had the opportunity to observe in person the methods of how small scale, commercial composting is done. The windrow turner is also a very cool piece of machinery. I think Filoli should be proud that the composting is going so well and that they seem to be successfully making the transition to more sustainable soil amending practices.

I’ve been pruning two huge, old camellias and I must say that when I finish one, it is very satisfying to step back and look at my work. The last two I did are round and about 10 to 12 feet high and
maybe six to eight feet wide. They each took me two to three afternoons, but the finished product is an open, round, non-fluffy globe that should flower well in the winter and spring. Now I’m dreaming about camellia pruning. I see the leaves and the Felcos in my mind when I close my eyes.

WEEK 9: I am now in my final area! As the lead, Shippy said, it’s like my Olympics of the internship because I’ve been practicing the past eight weeks and now is my time to perform. After working in the sunken garden I feel more experienced in lots of skills I didn’t used to have. I’m also looking forward to learning more about fruit tree care as the orchard is part of this area.

Shippy explained to me what the regular morning routine will be for me: walking through the area looking for animal damage, dry spots in the lawn, etc. I will also take down the electric fence around the front of the house.

This area is unique from all the others for a few reasons. First is that it has a lot of hardscape and a great deal more non-formal and wild landscapes. This means different kinds of maintenance, like rough-cutting along roads, picking up trash in the parking lot, looking out for safety hazards, etc. Shippy emphasized the fact that this is a very public part of the public garden, as everybody who comes through here sees it. Also having the orchards is an interesting aspect because these are not attached to the formal gardens and really just serve as germplasm storage rather than appealing to visitors. Still, their care is important.

Schmidt is recognized as an Outstanding New Student at the Hort Club banquet.

We just completed our plant ID test this afternoon and tomorrow we will have tests on power equipment and hand tools. I feel I did very well on the ID test — it was similar in format to Dr. Hannings’ Plant Materials classes at Cal Poly (Filoli’s was possibly easier!). I think the tools tests will be more in depth than the ID test as in addition to names we’ll have to know uses, parts, care and maintenance.

To sum up my experience at Filoli, I’ve done five internships since I’ve been in college and I truly believe that I have learned more at this program than at any other place I’ve been. I came into this internship with minimal hands-on garden experience and now I can look at the garden and identify what needs to be done, what tools to use and of course can do it myself! The most important lesson for me is that if I get a job like this one out of college, I would be happy and satisfied with the work I do. Visitors to the garden always comment to me that “this must be the best job in the world!” and although it is hard work, at this point in my life they are absolutely right. 🌸
The Bug Detective

Dani Ruais (EHS ’11) was so excited by her introductory entomology class that she filled out the paperwork to declare her concentration in plant protection sciences as soon as the class ended. She wanted to be a Bug Detective.

Upon graduation, she took a position as a pest technician in the Horticulture Unit while studying for her Pest Control Advisor exam. “I realized I am not cut out to be a pesticide applicator — wearing a full Tyvek suit and respirator while applying pesticides in a hot greenhouse in the middle of summer. But I do love to scout and recommend control measures,” she said.

Her days consisted of monitoring the greenhouses, outdoor nursery and landscaped areas at the unit, identifying signs of damage, making recommendations for control measures for various weeds, insects, mites and plant pathogens, and applying those control measures to resolve the pest problems. Ruais worked closely with the Horticulture Unit Technician, Ellen Brack, as well as with Dr. Robert Shortell and students who were growing their various enterprise projects in the greenhouses. She made constant use of her notes from the classes she took, as well as the web sites and databases her professors told her about so many times that she had them memorized.

“Cal Poly is full of opportunities and positions here are unique,” Ruais recounted. “You have all the support you can get to prevent you from making mistakes. Even if you make a mistake and, for example, burn all the plants with the wrong dose of pesticides, you do not get fired or ruin your career. Instead, you catch some flak, learn from your mistakes, and try to amend the situation.”

Ruais also appreciated that she had the flexibility to try out different sprayers and chemicals, various application methods, and gain experience using beneficial insects. “I came away with probably a wider knowledge than a lot of pest control advisors who have worked in only one or two crops their whole careers,” she said. “I got to work with such a variety of pests, crops and environmental situations that I feel almost like a jack-of-all-trades — a little knowledge about everything pest-related!”

Read more about Ruais’ experiences on the HCS blog: calpolyhcs.wordpress.com.

“Cal Poly is full of opportunities and positions here are unique.”
All the Green Spaces

“'I’m about 10 years ahead of where I thought I would be at this point in my career,” says Andy Magnasco (EHS ’09), the superintendent of Carmel Valley Ranch. Magnasco oversees all the resort’s green spaces: a spa with a green roof; a recreation area called the River Ranch, with a kids’ camp, pool and tennis courts (two clay and eight hard surface); a vineyard; an apiary; 7,000 lavender plants that hotel guests can harvest; a fruit orchard and a vegetable garden; an 18-hole golf course and hiking trails. There are five homeowners’ associations with which he has to interface, facility rentals to prep, firewood to supply so guests can make s’mores. His crew of 24 can be seen refreshing planters, pruning trees, landscaping and maintaining the pool area.

“The ranch is like a living organism — the work never ends,” Magnasco admits. “So patience is the biggest thing you need to have.”

Magnasco attended community college before transferring to Cal Poly. He knew he wanted to work in turf and sportsfield management. Two days after graduation he started at Carmel Valley Ranch as the assistant superintendent. Wanting more experience, two years later he moved to work at Sonoma Golf Club as the assistant superintendent. “It was just what I needed to do,” he explains. “I gained more confidence in my knowledge of overall maintenance and my ability to plan a maintenance program was enhanced while my network with people in the industry expanded.” In March 2012, Carmel Valley Ranch asked Magnasco to return, this time as superintendent.

He hit the ground running, taking on the battles with oak moth, as well as gopher and mole pressure by the hotel rooms, while planning for a landscape renovation around the clubhouse.

“Cal Poly faculty are still a great resource for me whenever I have a question or need some advice,” Magnasco contends.

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“Cal Poly really prepared me for the job and trained me for this job with Learn by Doing, which we try to incorporate in our daily activities here at the ranch. We constantly try things and then we go with what works.”

See Magnasco talk about his work and daily activities at Carmel Valley Ranch at aeps.calpoly.edu/careers.
A Path to the Salinas Valley

From seed to harvest, Chris Drew (CS ’01), production manager for Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville, Calif., is responsible for all inputs, irrigation, fertility and groundwork. Ocean Mist, the largest landowner in Castroville, is co-owned by another Cal Poly alumnus, Ed Boutonnet (CS ’62). As Drew walks through the fields, checking the artichokes, romaine or celery, he probes the soil to determine his next steps and muses, “You can experience all four seasons out here in one day.”

The life of a production manager entails long hours and hard work, especially in California’s year-round growing season. During harvest, he normally works 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and, even then, he finds the day goes by fast. Drew spends 90 percent of his day in the fields, citing paperwork as “a necessary evil.” He speaks fluent Spanish which he learned working with the fieldworkers. “You just can’t have a viable career here without Spanish,” he states.

Drew’s parents were schoolteachers but his grandfather farmed corn and soybeans in Illinois, and Drew attributes his interest in farming to his grandfather. Drew started vegetable transplanting when he was 18 and worked during college breaks, spending two years at Cuesta College before transferring to Cal Poly. He went to work for Ocean Mist in 2003.

Drew has seen changes in vegetable production and marketing since he graduated. Thanks to farmers markets and an uptick in home-grown vegetables, “People know what things should taste like again,” he says. Farmers markets do compete with big growers like Ocean Mist, because local farmers can let vegetables stay on the plant longer than a commercial grower, so the vegetables gain natural sweetness from the sugars.

Technical advances also present opportunities for growers, as well as challenges. For example, the tomato’s genome has recently been decoded in the hopes of breeding better ones (the results were published in the journal Nature). The genome is critical to understanding the Solanaceae family, which includes the potato and tobacco plant as well, and how it has developed genetically by adding more genes (some 31,760). Tomato plant breeders have focused on prolonging shelf life, but now can use DNA to breed for better taste and quality. “As technology is more at the forefront of agriculture, the opportunities grow exponentially,” Drew says.

“Farmers markets and new, site-appropriate vegetable cultivars are something we have to keep an eye on,” Drew says. “Seed companies have bought genetic pools to create seed and varieties that do well in other areas. If farmers can grow broccoli in upstate New York in the summer it is not worth the expense and travel time to come from California.

“The best part about my job? I love doing it. I get to be outdoors. I get to work with a wide variety of people. Agriculture is one of those careers that’s different every day. It never gets old, and there’s always opportunity.”

See Drew describe more about his job at aeps.calpoly.edu/careers.
Recession Reflections

“A lot of business owners are risk takers,” explains Jon Singley (CS ’81), owner of Blue Spruce Landscape and Construction in Campbell, Calif. Singley should know, after more than three decades of experience as a business owner. He started his own landscape business even before attending Cal Poly.

The economic downturn cut off the home equity pipeline to finance landscape remodeling and falling housing prices combined with the mortgage crisis meant that new jobs were few and far between. Though the recession has been declared over, recovery is slow. “Landscape maintenance saved us,” says Singley, who is a contractor, “but there are also a lot of people who can’t afford it anymore.”

According to Better Homes and Gardens, more intimate landscapes and small garden rooms are the trend in 2012: “No longer are people attracted to the extravagant design of a large patio or multi-level deck. Gathering close enough to hear a whisper is where people feel most relaxed.”

Singley notes, “Before the recession people seemed more interested in landscapes and construction for show. Rather than relaxing by staying at home and enjoying being there, they traveled to relax.

“We’ve changed our designs and what we build, focusing more on creating intimate spaces in smaller yards. This is where people want to be now — at home — and how they want to connect with others. I am building more small sitting areas, private gardens — it is more about providing a
tranquil retreat. I encourage people to have outdoor kitchens and make spaces to hang out in and be with friends and family.”

As landscape jobs decreased, and unemployment in California reached a high of 12.4 percent in 2010, Singley noticed a real change in his employees and their outlook. “We used to take work for granted and thought that people would always want us to do their projects. In June of 2005 we had a year’s backlog. Now, we tell people we can start next week.

“You need to have a company culture that survives even the difficult times and layoffs, so that people still want to be part of your company. Good people attract good people. We have employees now working for someone else — they have to make a living — still calling me to ask if there’s any work for them. One of the tough things over the last four years is not being able to employ all the folks we did before.

“A lot of business owners are risk takers,” Singley repeats. “But I think they do things differently now. The recession has given us perseverance and a new perspective on what we do and build.”

See more of the interview with Jon Singley at aeps.calpoly.edu/careers.
Internships Go International

“Jetlag took forever to get over,” reported Analisia Basurto (AEPS ’13). “I’m into my second week of the internship here at Wisley Gardens and am absolutely loving it.” Two HCS students spent their summer internships in Europe this year, one student at Claude Monet’s garden, northwest of Paris, France, and another student at Wisley, the Royal Horticultural Society’s (RHS) flagship display and demonstration gardens outside London, England.

Katrina Burritt (EHS ’13) spent the month of August at Monet’s garden in Giverny. “It really is a beautiful place,” she wrote. “The garden is in a small village that is all designed similarly.” The Munn Volunteer Program offers students the possibility of working alongside the Monet garden’s gardening team, assisting with dead-heading, weeding, planting and watering, with duties varying with the seasons and weather. For Burritt’s first two weeks, she recounted, she did
nothing more than deadhead flowers six-and-a-half hours a day. In exchange for the interns’ work, the garden provides accommodation on-site, bikes, Internet access and a 250 euro stipend. A minimum of French is an asset, they say, and the daily schedule leaves time for those who want to take French classes. “Unfortunately,” said Burritt, “the few English-speaking gardeners are not educated on such simple things as what plants are used in the garden,” so not speaking French can pose a difficulty.

Every year a limited number of unsalaried internships are available at Wisley and Rosemoor for horticultural students seeking short-term (one to three months) work experience to supplement their studies. The experience provides an opportunity to work in a prestigious garden while learning basic gardening skills and techniques. Interns work alongside experienced gardeners. “Our garden managers are very skilled and much can be gained by being observant and talking to garden staff to learn more about horticulture as a career,” the RHS contends.

Basurto agreed. “They ARE absolutely amazing and incredibly knowledgeable. They were always eager to explain things to me and teach me, never rushing or making me feel like I was bothering them.”

Basurto lived in a flat with other interns in the nearby village, which is a 10 minute walk from work. Wisley subsidized her rent, and her accommodations included her own room and bathroom, with a shared kitchen and living space for $60/week. “The housing was about three miles from the nearest town,” she reported. “We are not given any transportation, so we rely on recycled bikes, our feet, taxis and sometimes the kind neighbor with a car.

“Everyone here has been incredibly warm and friendly,” Basurto said as she described her daily routine. Each week she moved to a different department of the garden, which is more than 200 acres, in order to get a broad-scale view of all it offers. Her regular work day ran from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with a 20 minute tea break at 9:45 a.m. and then an hour lunch break at noon. One week she joined a team weeding, pruning and edging in the Woody Perennial Department, which involves the arboretum, pinetum and countless beds of camellias, hydrangeas and rhododendrons. At almost 12 acres, it is the largest department of Wisley Gardens. Another week she worked in the Alpine Department, which features rock and sand gardens. “I have helped dig out old plants, plant new ones, and learned how to prune and weed with tweezers!” she said.

Additionally, she attended lectures by the Wisley staff, such as proper use of the electric conductivity meter and how to check fertilizer concentrations for alpine plants, or soil analysis data and how it is used in the department’s planning. “The staff brings you into everything that they do and freely share what they know,” Basurto said. “They love teaching and sharing their love for plants. I would work under those managers again in a heartbeat.”
Golf Course Superintendents’ Words of Wisdom

When asked at the 2012 Cal Poly Cup what advice the superintendents could give the students:

“You don’t have to be good at golf to work on a golf course.”
“Be to work early,” and “Don’t show up late.”
“Be a go getter — go the extra mile.”
“Networking is important — volunteer for your local GCSA chapter.”
“Don’t be a clock watcher.”
“Be positive and don’t speak negatively of others.”
“Look for the good and enjoy the day.”
“Be visible.”

Or on a lighter note…

“Don’t become a superintendent.”
“Run while you still can.”
“It’s top secret — I can’t tell you.”
“Marry rich.”
“Learn Chinese.”
“Go North vs. South.”

When asked “What do you know now that you didn’t know then?”

“You are never off.”
“Take time off if you want to stay married.”
“Even if you do everything right, you can still lose your job — there are no guarantees.”
“Keep all notes, photos, files and emails — particularly correspondence that told you to do something. You may need them one day.”
“Just do it — don’t be afraid to fail. If you do, ‘fess up, don’t cover up.”
“Take more classes on people management.”
“I didn’t know **** then and I don’t know **** now.”

When asked, “Where do you go to find new hires?”

“Primarily word of mouth (shows the importance of being visible and networking).”
“Friends of friends.”
“Craigslist.”

When asked about their pet peeves, the superintendents responded with:

“Take the time to make the pin straight.”
“Rope stakes aren’t tight.”
“Don’t drive by trash.”
“Pull the weed in front of you.”
“Don’t leave stuff in the lunch room for someone else to clean up.”
“Report broken equipment.”
“Don’t call in sick by text.”
“When someone doesn’t show up for a shift on Sunday because you were partying on Saturday.”
“Crooked tee blocks.”
“Cigarette butts thrown on the ground.”
“Tell your boss you have an appointment days ahead, not hours ahead.”

When asked what they are looking for in a new hire:

“Competent.”
“Common sense.”
“Good communicator.”
“Be cleanly dressed and groomed.”
“Wear a suit to your job interviews.”
“Send a follow-up letter or thank you.”
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