

# NHLA

# NEWSletter

Vol. 39 No. 2

Informing and educating members of the Green Industry

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## Culture is Essential

by Andrew Pelkey, NHLA VP

**W**hen talking among industry friends, a common theme since the pandemic and prior, is that staffing has been difficult.

As a landscape company owner, I appreciate their struggle, but don't necessarily share in their difficulties, nor do I feel guilty that attracting and retaining employees isn't a problem for our firm.

I can say this with conviction because I know the time, resources, and care taken to create an employee-focused culture isn't

easy. When you have a living, breathing, moving employee-focused culture, you have a destination that people want to travel to, and stay... "When you build it, they will come."

When you think about positive workplace culture you probably think about a Friday cook out for the crew, gift bags at Christmas, coffee and donuts for breakfast, or a company outing. While these are components to successful positive culture, it can't stop there.

To truly achieve the ideal

working place. You can't start with your goals as an owner, or manager. You need to start with the goals, desires, wants, and needs of your team from the bottom up. This concept can be referred to as "front line focused." If you can put your team's needs before yours, they will allow you to reach your goals. But they must come first. Always, without exception.

Fostering positive culture can't be something you put time to on your calendar once a week

*Cont. on p. 20*

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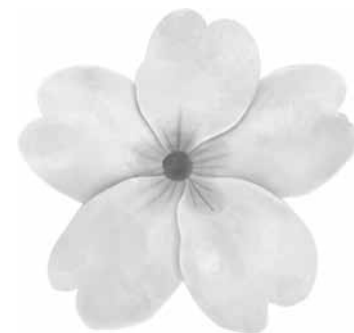
## President's Notes

By David DeJohn, NHCLP

You would think that for as many times now that I've had to sit down and write something for this column that it would come easy, but it doesn't. I mean, I make notes and jot down ideas for topics as they come up. I read the newsletter I get from the National Association of Landscape Professionals for information that might be relevant to pass on. And of course, there's always NHLA news to report. I swear though, the minute I sit down at this desk to write something, it all just goes away and I end up staring at a blank page for way too long. Then I suddenly remember that I have to fill the bird feeders! Not later, not tomorrow. I mean right now! And when was the last time I cleaned out my truck? That certainly can't wait any longer! Then there's the wood stove to be filled, and the dog is staring at me, so maybe we should walk down and get the mail from our mailbox that's conveniently a half mile away, and from the look in her eyes it's imperative that we go right now! Any excuse to not sit, and no excuse is too trivial to get me up from the desk or the drawing board to do something else.

And it's not like I don't want to do it. I do like to write and I do like to draw and do designs, but it's something about that blank page. It's just there, by itself. Just waiting. Kind of like this article or a new landscape project or a new planting, and definitely like a new fieldstone wall. It's that first pen to paper, that first scoop of the excavator, that first shovel in the ground, that first base stone set and then, hopefully, you're off and running.

And here we are, full blown into a new year – kind of like a blank piece of paper, in a way. Just waiting to be filled in. Looking back at this time last year, almost to the day, when I was probably sitting at my desk wondering what to write, the weather was almost exactly what we're seeing now, mild with very little snow. We've had a few days where the temperature was in the single digits, at least in the mornings, but for the most part it has stayed in the 30s and 40s. There have been several days recently when I didn't need gloves while working on a stone wall, which is great in one way but very wrong in another. Of course it's only the end of the first week of January so there's plenty of time for it to get cold and for the snow to come, and I hope it does, especially for all of you who depend on snow removal to get through the winter. By the time this issue comes out it will be time for tapping trees and we're going to need snow and that combination of cold nights and warm days



for a good harvest, so we'll see.

We have quite a bit planned for this coming year and a few challenges to fill that blank page. We're finalizing details for the upcoming DOS / First Aid Safety day that will be held at North Point Outdoors in Derry on March 29, so save that date. Thank you very much to Central NH Trailer Sales and Site One for sponsoring breakfast and lunch, and thank you to Cross Insurance for sponsoring the medical kits to be handed out to attendees.

We're currently scoping out some sites to hold a pruning workshop and one on proper mulching techniques that will happen in April. So if you would

With that said, I would like to ask: Has anything we've done this past year, whether it was teaming up with NARFA and Greenius, or the Twilight or Dinner Meetings, or the Field Day, been helpful or made a difference? If so, let us know, and if not, then you really need to let us know what didn't work and what would have.

be willing to host either one please let me know, especially if they're in the Seacoast, Lakes Region, or western part of the state. The same for Twilight Meetings. We really want to start moving these events around the state instead of always in the Concord and Manchester areas, so we need your help on that.

On January 9, we held our second Board Retreat, facilitated by Mike Barwell and Annette Zamarchi. This gave the Board a chance to look back at last year and talk about what we accomplished and to look forward and discuss where we want to go. It's a brainstorming session without the distraction of having to do regular Board business and to put all possibilities on the table. Thanks again to Mike and Annette for guiding us through it, I look forward to 2023 to see where we go.

With that said, I would like to ask: Has anything we've done this past year, whether it was teaming up with NARFA and Greenius, or the Twilight or Dinner Meetings, or the Field Day, been helpful or made a difference? If so, let us know, and if not, then you really need to let us know what didn't work and what would have. We have almost a full calendar already planned out for 2023, but as always your input is very important!

Well that's it for now. As if I didn't have enough distractions from writing, we just picked up a new 8-month-old puppy from a local rescue service and he's a handful – but a good boy and a future work buddy!

Hope you all have a good rest of the winter and here's looking toward spring! 🐾

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**DIRECTORS:** (Vote for one) *one year term*

- Donnie Piccirillo, Pierson Nurseries  
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Online voting will open on March 1.**



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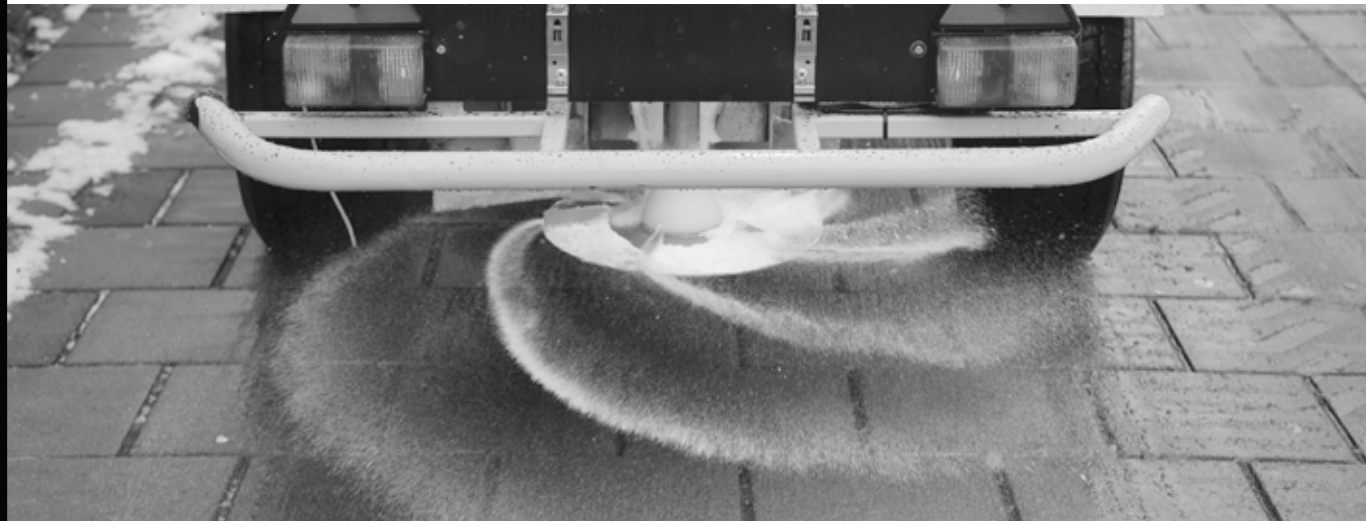
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## Second NHLA Safety Day Includes First Aid Class, Troop G Compliance

by Mike Barwell

NHLA's Second Annual Safety Day kicks up a notch by offering two important workshops that every landscape professional should attend on Wednesday, March 29 at North Point Outdoors in Derry.

New this year is a Job Site First Responder class that every landscaper must attend. Two experienced first responders will lead the First Aid workshop: Ed Gannon, retired Derry firefighter/paramedic; and Bob Taylor, Windham firefighter/EMT. This two-hour introductory workshop will cover how to care for injured workers with

cuts, burns, heat stress, or other worksite injuries. Attendees will receive a First Aid Kit courtesy of **Cross Insurance**.

Troop G of the NH Department of Safety returns for two classes on vehicle safety and compliance. Last year's session drew 120-plus attendees as three Troopers inspected trucks, trailers and large equipment for Federal and State vehicle compliance. As Troop G steps up its statewide roadside inspections again this year you'll want to be prepared.

"Every landscaper should attend this workshop for vehicle compliance because regulations

change all the time," said David DeJohn, NHLA president. "We all need to know how to take care of ourselves and our co-workers and know the signs of heat stress, dehydration, and injuries. We are the ones on the scene before first responders arrive on site. This could save a life."

The day begins with registration at 8:30 am, with a breakfast sponsored by **Central NH Trailers**, at North Point, 22 Ashleigh Drive, Derry.

Both two-hour sessions begin at 9:30 am and run simultaneously, with free lunch sponsored by **Site One** from 11:30 am-12:30 pm.

The second sessions run from 12:30-2:30 pm, followed by a brief wrap up from NHLA leadership ending at 3 pm.

Cost of the workshops is \$50 for NHLA members and \$65 for non-members – however, non-members can get the discount rate by joining and paying their annual fee of \$150 at registration.

In case of snow or weather cancellation, the workshop will be moved to Friday, March 31.

Prevent a ticket, maybe save a life. It's worth the time and effort to be there.

Registration will be available soon at [nhlaonline.org](http://nhlaonline.org).

We all need to know how to take care of ourselves and our co-workers and know the signs of heat stress, dehydration, and injuries. We are the ones on the scene before first responders arrive on site. This could save a life."



Last year's Safety Day was a big success. Much more is being offered this year. Join us on March 29 at North Point Outdoors in Derry.

New this year is a Job Site First Responder class led by Ed Gannon, retired Derry firefighter/paramedic and Bob Taylor, Windham firefighter/EMT.

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# Failures....Let's Give Them the Boot!

by Bill Gardocki

For those of you who do most of your work in the softscape end of our business, what does a failure on the job site mean? I'm not talking about not getting paid in full, but something like having 30% of the plant material die, or that picky customer not liking the color of the mulch, or the drip irrigation system not getting all the plant roots watered. Thankfully, these are things that can be fixed or replaced.

Now think of a failure in hardscaping. A 4' retaining wall that falls over in the homeowners back yard can kill a child, pavers that sink along the edge of an install can cause a trip and fall hazard.

These can be catastrophic failures – not only for the homeowner but for you as the installer.

When I started installing block walls and pavers when they became available in the early 1980s it was like the wild west. Dealers had little knowledge how to install these products because for the most part they were used to dealing only with gray block. There were no NCMA or ICPI certification classes that dealt with installation procedures, specifications, or products. As installers we had to use our best judgement on how to install the new products.

I am the first to admit I had

many failures in those early years. Not enough ¾" stone behind and below the block wall, not installing the base deep enough under my pavers, having jointing material wash out from between the pavers causing instability, using cut pieces that are too small to give stability to my install, and the list goes on. In 2001 I decided to learn the proper techniques and materials by becoming a certified ICPI contractor and flew to Florida where the class was being offered. I followed up a few years later with my NCMA certification. The main purpose of certification is to properly educate the contractor on the correct procedures and components of a hardscape project.

The certifications helped end the failures on our job sites. I find it very gratifying to see installations that we did 10, 15, 20 years ago that look the same today as the day they were installed. That is what we should all be aiming for. At the end of a hardscape job I used to joke with my customers telling them that I never wanted to see them again. At least, not until they moved into

a new house and needed more hardscaping services.

No one benefits from a failure. Your reputation suffers, the homeowner is not happy and refuses to give you a good recommendation, or worse, someone is injured. Give failure the boot and consider getting certified. Being able to tell a potential client to do a drive by or call a past client who is willing to give you a good referral is what it is all about.

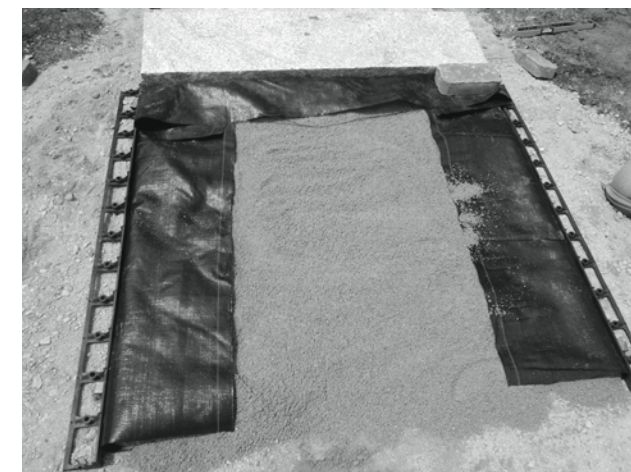
This spring NHLA, with support from the New England Concrete Manufacturers Association, will be offering a half-day program aimed at hardscape installers. It will be a short course on proper wall and paver installation. I have been asked to teach this seminar, and I will focus two hours on paver installation specifications and installation techniques, and two hours on retaining wall specifications and installation techniques.

Watch for more information!

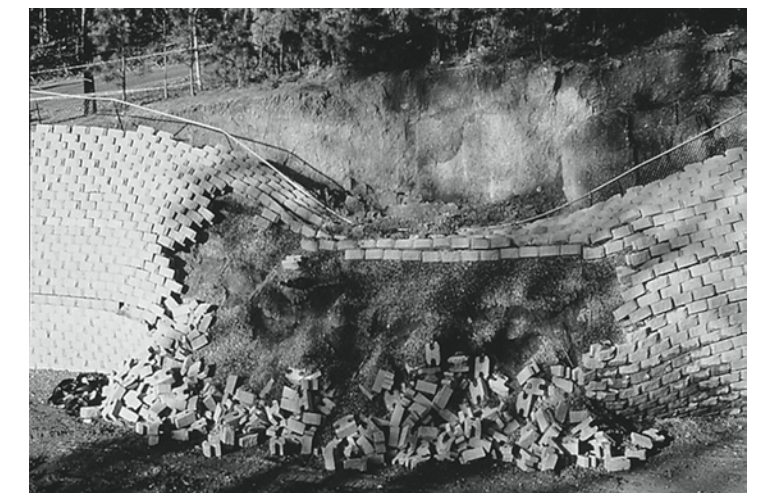
— Bill Gardocki is a past president of NHLA (1994 & 1995). He is now a hardscape educator.



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# Why Get Certified? The Employee's Perspective

by Daisy Chinburg, NHCLP

We all know the main reasons to become certified, right? The echo chamber repeats “better pay...increased credibility...employee retention...” and so on. These reasons may be falling on deaf ears, not because they are untrue, but because they are tired, overused, or are just plain unrelatable.

I'd like to look at it from a different perspective, something more personal, as a recent NHCLP myself (as of 2020). *Why* was becoming a New Hampshire Landscape Professional worth it to me, as a person with over ten years' field experience and a five-year stretch with my employer? I think that the benefits reach across a wide net of positive outcomes that contribute to a better quality of life for individuals who decide to take the plunge.

Wealth and employment are two of the big-ticket indicators of quality of life. The relationship between these contributors and the topic at hand is clear, as one generally begets the other. When we look at some of the other indicators, the view becomes less clear. I would like to look at how professional development (*ahem* – becoming an NHCLP)

can contribute to other areas of an individual's life that are often credited with influencing the measure of one's quality of life: social belonging, education, and mental health.

Certification supports a better quality of life for individual employees, which in turn supports the success of the employer. I'm going to run through some possible scenarios that explore how expanding your education and skill set can lead to a better quality of life for employees.

## Feeling Valued by Your Employer Leads to A Sense of Belonging

Scenario 1: Your employer inquires where your interests lie in the industry and shares ideas for career paths and opportunities that fit your interests. The company invests in you and your interests by enrolling you in the Plant Identification course through NHLA. You feel seen and valued by your employer and, in turn, are more likely to reciprocate the commitment. You become a human plant-cyclopedia and spread the wealth of knowledge to your colleagues, starting a contagious zest for

I would like to look at how professional development (*ahem* – becoming an NHCLP) can contribute to other areas of an individual's life that are often credited with influencing the measure of one's quality of life: social belonging, education, and mental health.

plant knowledge that spreads throughout the company that inspires your coworkers to follow your lead. This leads to a positive evolution in the company's culture.

Scenario 2: Although you have been working in garden maintenance, you express interest in stonework, specifically dry-stacked stone walls. You are switched over to the construction division to gain experience and are introduced to opportunities offered by The Stone Trust. You become one of the students in a Basic Level class [more info at: [thestonetrust.org/7-7-2022-cont-intro-nh/](http://thestonetrust.org/7-7-2022-cont-intro-nh/)] and bring that knowledge back to the field to continue to enhance your skill set on the job, eventually to demonstrate enough new skills to warrant a pay raise.

## Continuing Your Education is Good for Your Mental Health

Scenario 1: As you learn more about your craft—whether it be in irrigation, turf management, garden bed maintenance, pruning specialist, design, sales, hardscapes—the value of your work becomes more and more clear. It's important to take pride in your

work. As you learn more about the ins and outs of your specialty and/or profession, you'll come to appreciate the final product, and the value of your expertise, *that much more*.

Scenario 2: You, a hardscape salesperson, find yourself in a conversation with your cousin at Thanksgiving about plants. They want to know why their hydrangeas aren't blooming. You don't work with plants often and before you took the Plant ID course and got certified you would dread these types of encounters. Thanks to your certification through NHLA, you have enough plant-cyclopedia in you that you can carry the conversation and offer solutions or resources that may help your cousin. Helping people makes you feel good about yourself, and you have developed more self-confidence.

## How New NHCLP's Contribute to their Employer's Success

Scenario 1: You are training a new employee, and they comment on your skill set, wondering how long it takes to get to your paygrade and level of expertise.

You reply accordingly and tell your trainee how your employer supports professional development for their staff, using your own story as an example. The wheels in your trainee's head begin to turn as they ponder their own future in landscaping. This encounter leads to another staff member who is engaged in his or her trade and takes care in providing a good product and/or service. This level of support and engagement increases employee retention for the company, and the resources the company spends on recruiting can now be directed elsewhere.

I think that the benefits stretch across a wide net of positive outcomes that contribute to a better quality of life for individuals who decide to take the plunge.

Scenario 2: You are an account manager in a conversation with a customer about how a patio installation went. They share how happy they are with the end result, but how the best part of the experience was the interactions with your crew members, commenting specifically on their ability to problem-solve quickly and answer any questions the customer had about the work in a way that was easy to understand.

Later you find that this customer has left a positive review of the company online. Future customers who see positive reviews like this one online find it easier to establish trust in your company's credibility. You find that your customer base is expanding not only because of the positive reviews, but because your happy customer has also referred you to folks in the community who are looking to get similar work done at their own properties. You feel great about your crews' work as well as your own work in facilitating the successful projects that have led to more business for your company.

I hope that reading this article sheds light on the fact that the benefits of becoming an NHCLP go deeper than just being able to get a raise and retaining employees. It's important to think about the reasons behind the obvious benefits that may have a lasting effect on an individual's quality of life. Having an employer that supports an individual's own professional success and encourages them to follow their interests leads to a sense of belonging both within the company and within the community of NHCLPs. More education leads to more career opportunities and skill sets, and greater pride and self-confidence in one's work.

These changes may influence the company's success through a positive company culture, increase in employee retention, high quality products and services, and customer satisfaction. I'm sure you'll agree that those are all key elements in having a successful company. 🌱

## Certification Corner

by Abby Zuidema, NHCLP  
Certification Coordinator

## Demonstrate Your Leadership in Landscape: Earn Your NH Landscape Professional Certification



### New Hampshire Landscape Certified Professional (NHCLP) Exam

Date: Saturday March 4, 2023 1-3 pm (Written portion only)  
Advanced Registration Required. Applications must be received by February 24, 2023. For more information and to download the registration forms visit the NHLA website. Submit your application packet today!

### Winter 2023 Manual Review Course:

- Three out of four sessions remaining: \$25 per session  
Tuesdays 6 - 8 pm, via Zoom
- Feb. 7: Plant Identification, Nomenclature, Hardiness, Native & Invasive Plants
- Feb. 14: Turf, Planting Instructions, Plant Maintenance, Safety
- Feb. 21: Landscape Design, Hardscape, Bidding and Estimating

### 2023 Plant Identification Summer Course:

Fourteen 3-hour sessions covering the basics of plant identification and identification of each of the plants on the Plant Identification List. Held one evening a week, June-September, at NH nurseries, parks, and estates.

Check out our website for more information. [nhlaonline.org/how-to-become-certified/](http://nhlaonline.org/how-to-become-certified/). Contact: [NHLACert@gmail.com](mailto:NHLACert@gmail.com)



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# The Heirloom Gardener Challenges the Green Industry

by Mike Barwell

**“W**e all want a place that makes us feel right in the world.”

With that remark, John Forti, the celebrated executive director at Bedrock Gardens in Lee and author of the widely read *The Heirloom Gardener*, concluded his remarks for NHLA's kick-off event of 2023, January 18 in Manchester.

Forti took 50 attendees through a quick history of gardening – and the philosophy of gardening – by challenging the Green Industry to “cultivate a sense of place ... by finding the things that work in the place that you live.”

While not entirely eschewing

the formal lawn and gardens of most of our clients’ (and perhaps our own) dreams, Forti encourages us to explore the landscape. “Places tell stories,” he said. “Borrow those elements. When you know the stories, what the plants can tell you, you can sell that to your customers. You can have the formalities but cultivate the edges with the wild.”

Forti encouraged landscapers to “remember the old ways. We used to know things” about plants and our surroundings. He is a strong advocate of biodiversity and local agricultural, farmers markets and traditional cuisine. “Eat your yard!” is a favorite

enthusiastic remark. Forti encouraged landscapers to “remember the old ways. We used to know things” about plants and our surroundings. He is a strong advocate of biodiversity and local agricultural, farmers markets and traditional cuisine. “Eat your yard!” is a favorite enthusiastic remark.

enthusiastic remark.

Before signing copies of *The Heirloom Gardener*, Forti challenged the attendees to recall who got them interested in gardening. “Who were your mentors?” he asked. “But more importantly, who are YOU mentoring to make

a place that makes us feel right in the world?”

Information on Bedrock Gardens: [bedrockgardens.org](http://bedrockgardens.org). Information on John Forti's book: [amazon.com/Heirloom-Gardener-Traditional-Plants-Skills/dp/1604699930](https://amazon.com/Heirloom-Gardener-Traditional-Plants-Skills/dp/1604699930)







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## Pearson Scholarship Recipient

by Alan Anderson, Chairman of the Ruth E. and Leon E. Pearson Memorial Scholarship Fund

The Ruth E. and Leon E. Pearson Memorial Scholarship for 2022 was awarded to Sydney Hussey, who attends the University of Massachusetts Stockbridge School of Agriculture. Leon Pearson, an alumnus from there, would be proud of her.

The scholarship amount for 2022 was \$8,000.

Sydney entered the Stockbridge School in 2019 and earned an associate degree in horticultural science. She is continuing her studies there toward a bachelor's degree in sustainable horticulture. She has been on the dean's list several times and received her



associate degree Cum Laude. Congratulations Sydney, as that is no small feat to achieve.

Sydney's greatest career aspiration is to be an educator. She says, "Educating and producing great employees is essential to ensure our industry's future."

Sydney certainly has a good handle on paving the way for our future generations, giving them a model to aspire to.

On behalf of the Pearson Memorial Scholarship Fund the Pearson Committee would like to congratulate Sydney and wish her the best as she moves forward in the horticulture industry.

The current Pearson Committee members are:

Chuck Simpson, Simpson Landscape; Peter DeBrusk, Tuckahoe Turf Farm; Andrew Pelkey, North Point Outdoors; Jeff Toomey, Toomey Landscaping; and Read Custom Soils; and Pearson Committee Chair, Alan Anderson.

Leon Pearson, an alumnus from the Stockbridge School, would be proud of her.

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# Landscaping for Water Quality Workshop

This popular workshop teaches landscapers and other land managers principles and best practices for creating and maintaining attractive, functional landscapes while protecting water quality in lakes and rivers and is aimed at landscapers and land managers in the Monadnock Region.

The workshop will be held on Thursday, March 30 and Friday,

March 31 in person at Whitcomb Hall, 17 Main Street, in Swanzey, NH with a field session at Richardson Park on Swanzey Lake.

Participants will learn principles and best practices for creating and maintaining attractive, functional landscapes while protecting water quality in local lakes and rivers.

The workshop includes presentations and practical sessions. It

is designed for landscape professionals, watershed organization members, and community leaders responsible for managing land and water resources.

The workshop is developed by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Sea Grant, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, and in partnership with Outdoor Rooms Ecological

Landscape Design Services and hosted by the town of Swanzey.

Pesticide credits will be available pending State approval. New Hampshire Certified Landscape Professionals certificates of completion are also available.

Details and registration: [des.nh.gov/events/2023-landscaping-water-quality-workshop](https://des.nh.gov/events/2023-landscaping-water-quality-workshop)



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# Special Registration Code for NHLA Members to the NE Hardscape Exp

The Northeast Hardscape Expo invites NHLA members to attend with special VIP Guest admission.

The Expo is on March 22-23, 2023 at the Springfield, MA Eastern States Exposition grounds. NEHEXPO23 is the largest hardscape trade show and educational forum in the Northeast

Use Registration code: NLA10

Tickets and info at [www.NEHEXPO.com](http://www.NEHEXPO.com)



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or handle in one monthly team building event. It needs to be the platform for each interaction you have with your team and each decision you make.

One of our pillars of culture (out of our 10) is:

**Create a tone of friendliness and warmth** – Every conversation, phone call, e-mail, sets a tone and creates a feeling. Pay attention to every interaction and be sure you're setting a tone of friendliness, warmth, and helpfulness.

Everyone deserves to feel respected and treated well. Even with a team over 120+ we have maintained this tone of friendliness and warmth. We can do this because each interaction my business partner and I have with an employee is friendly and warm. Our leadership team fol-

lows suit, and it flows down to the bottom and then back up.

The familiar saying of "people don't leave companies, they leave managers" has been true since the beginning of time, but even more so today. Our industry has become less desirable to the next generation along with other skilled labor industries like carpentry, plumbing, or HVAC. I think that society puts a fair amount of blame on the younger generation for being too lazy or not wanting to work with their hands. While maybe some of this is true... I think our industry along with other skilled labor industries are simply missing the boat on positive company culture that industries such as technology or finance aren't.

What is your first question when someone quits on you? If



Every conversation, phone call, e-mail, sets a tone and creates a feeling. Pay attention to every interaction and be sure you're setting a tone of friendliness, warmth, and helpfulness.

your answer isn't "what did we do or not do to make them quit," you're searching in the wrong place. Our team is ours to lose or not add to, the responsibility sits with the owners and leadership teams.

Our industry members deserve better. You can be that owner or

manager that sets the tone for your company. It doesn't need to start with money, events, or swag. It needs to start from your heart and the rest will follow. ✨

— Andrew Pelkey is chief operations officer and co-owner of North Point Outdoors. He is the current NHLA VP.



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**MEMBER (1 year):** Someone actively engaged in the landscape industry or allied professions or industries. **Annual Dues: \$150.00**

**MEMBER (3 Years):** Someone actively engaged in the landscape industry or allied professions or industries. **Dues: \$420.00**

**STUDENT MEMBER:** Full-time student of horticulture-related studies. **Annual Dues: \$35.00**

*A renewal notice will be sent to you when your membership is near expiration.*

I hereby apply for membership and I agree to abide by the By-Laws established by the New Hampshire Landscape Association.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Please detach and return application to:  
 Pamela Moreau, NHLA Business Manager  
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—William C Bryant (1794-1878)

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[nhlaonline.org/nhla-newsletter/](http://nhlaonline.org/nhla-newsletter/)



# Calendar

■ **MARCH 3-5**

The Vermont Flower Show, Champlain Valley Expo, Essex Junction, VT, [vnlavt.org](http://vnlavt.org)

■ **MARCH 4**

NHCLP Exam, see page 13. (Manual Review Course Jan. 31-Feb 21, also see page 13)

■ **MARCH 7-9**

New England Regional Turfgrass Conference & Show, RI Convention Center, [www.NERTF.org](http://www.NERTF.org)

■ **MARCH 22-23**

Northeast Hardscape Expo, Springfield, MA Eastern States Exposition. Special rates for NHLA members; see page 19

■ **MARCH 29**

NHLA Safety Day, see page 7.

■ **MARCH 30-31**

UNHCE Landscaping for Water Quality, Swanzey, see page 18

■ **AUGUST 1**

**SAVE THE DATE: Annual NHLA Golf Tournament**