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Niagara Parks School of Horticulture granted four-year accreditation degree level

The ornamental horticulture diploma program of the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) School of Horticulture is celebrating an amazing milestone.

After months of review and consultation, the program has been granted accreditation at the four-year bachelor degree level by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

PLANET is the official trade association for members involved in landscape construction, design/build contracting, landscape maintenance reclamation and erosion control, irrigation, lawn care, interiorscaping and all aspects of installation, construction and maintenance of the living environment.

School superintendent Liz Klose, B.Sc. (Agr.), said the accreditation "will increase the awareness for other horticulture colleges and universities across Canada. The additional certifications we have integrated into our curriculum enhance the educational experience of the students. Our diploma, which is already held in high regard, in combination with the industry certification designations, provides our graduates with greater employment opportunities."

So how does a three-year program receive four-year bachelor degree level accreditation status?

It's easy to understand when you study the curriculum and program intensity. It operates 40 hours per week for 48 weeks per year for 36 consecutive months. There are over 35 academic courses encompassing horticulture and landscape fundamentals, including several courses in plant identification, landscape design, entomology and pathology, to name a few. As well, there are courses in business management and communication, in addition to an extensive practical training program totalling some 5,568 hours of training over the three years. (It's like holding down a regular full-time job in addition to a keeping up with a heavy academic course load.)

Combining the academic component with the practical application is what makes the program so unique, says Klose. "There is no other school in North America that has the same balance of academics and practical. This is what we're known for



Photo courtesy NPC School of Horticulture

Matt Robinson (left) and Tim Hickey inspect plants on the roll-out benches before plant-out last year. Plants for the seasonal displays are grown on-site. Students are involved in all aspects of production, from design and propagation, to plant-out and maintenance.

throughout the world."

She said that just like most horticulture and landscape businesses that get into full swing in the spring, "we begin our school year in late March and the training spans all four seasons. Our outdoor classroom (the Niagara Botanical Gardens) gives students an extra advantage. Communication, crew management, and the practical application of theoretical horticulture are employable skills necessary for success in the industry, all of which are taught and reinforced beyond the classroom."

This is a college/university level program, and thereby meets and exceeds the apprenticeship standards. Due to the strong practical component, it also envelops the Horticultural Technician program from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Additionally, the School of Horticulture integrates two industry certifications, Certified Horticulture Technician (CHT), known as Certified Landscape Technician (CLT) in the United States, and Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT) into their curriculum. This winter, the first Irrigation Technology course was offered, and was aligned with the requirements of the CIT.

The program attracts students from throughout North America and overseas, notes Klose. Applicants must be passionate about horticulture, have a good academic background in math,

communications and sciences from high school or post-secondary educational institutions, and possess a minimum of two seasons of related experience. "It takes a dedicated student to commit to school knowing they'll only have three to four weeks off a year. This type of education is an investment in their future career."

The program is similar to European hort schools, and was in fact modelled some 70 years ago after the famed School of Horticulture program at Kew Gardens in the U.K. NPC has re-established a partnership program with Kew that includes a internship opportunities. NPC has similar partnerships with other schools worldwide, and has welcomed interns from Japan, France and Ireland. Belgium may soon join that list.

The school's placement rate of 100 per cent speaks for itself. "We have more jobs (posted) than we have graduates for. Employers begin contacting us in the fall for spring placements. The students are in such high demand." 🍁

For more information on PLANET accreditation, visit www.landcarenetwork.org, and click on PLANET Campus. For more detailed information on the NPC School of Horticulture, check out www.schoolofhorticulture.com. The deadline for applications is June 30, 2007, for enrolment beginning in March 2008.

Alumni quite proud of their NPC roots

Members of the Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture alumni association are not shy about talking up their alma mater.

Sarah Wilson, of Vancouver, is among the most recent program grads. She learned about the program from a pair of alumni she met while in school in Nova Scotia – Tim Amos and Stan Kochanoff. With their enthusiastic endorsements of the program, “I looked into it right away,” said Wilson.

The program was all they said it would be, and more. “The course is especially challenging. We were always so busy. We covered a lot of material in three years, and it was also so practical.”

Having the chance to work in the internationally renowned NPC Botanical Gardens was particularly rewarding. “We would rotate through the different areas, so that by the time we were finished, we had the opportunity to work in each area, including the greenhouse. The Botanical Garden is our showpiece, not just the school’s backyard.”

Alumnus endorsements reflect the spirit of community embraced by faculty and students. “It’s like a family,” says superintendent Liz Klose. “We stick together and help one another whenever we can, such as with job referrals or internships.”

The alumni association remains quite active. It circulates a directory with contact information, something good to know when travelling. “You can always look up former classmates,” notes Klose, “many of whom you might not have seen for years.”

Amy Doan, of St. Thomas, Ontario, had a colleague at Canadale Nurseries recommend the school to her. The co-worker, Laura Wallis, suggested Doan would get a lot out of the program.

Doan is currently a second-year student. The school is well deserving of its reputation, she says, as the program is as interesting as it is challenging. The broadly based curriculum, she says, has opened a number of career avenues for her to consider, including plant pathology, entomology and turf-grass management. 🌿

NPC School of Horticulture in Congress awards spotlight

The Niagara Parks School of Horticulture was in the spotlight during this year’s Congress show and conference in Toronto hosted by Landscape Ontario.

Superintendent Liz Klose, B.Sc. (Agr.), received The College Horticulture Educator of the Year Award during Award of Excellence ceremonies sponsored by the Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association. The awards program was held during the International Horticulture, Lawn and Garden Trade Show and Conference – more commonly known as Congress – held in January in Toronto. The award was in recognition of Klose’s many years of support of horticulture at the college level, her involvement with the Ontario Horticulture Education Council and with Landscape Ontario, and her work in helping initiate, with school colleagues, the first college Certified Horticultural Technician Test at NPC.

Two NPC School of Horticulture students also earned awards at the ceremony. Second-year student Amy Doan was presented with the Tony DiGiovanni Scholarship. Third-year student Sarah Wilson received a post-secondary scholarship from the Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association.

Klose’s academic and industry involvement was also recognized closer to home. During their annual educational conference last November, the school’s alumni association presented her with an Award of Merit for contributions to the school, the association and the industry.

“It is truly an honour to be recognized by my industry colleagues,” she said. “I am indebted to the School and Botanical Gardens staff, students, alumni and other industry colleagues with whom I have the privilege of working with. Their knowledge and contributions are a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. They are equally deserving of this acknowledgement.”

Klose joined the faculty at the School of Horticulture and Botanical Gardens as an instructor and garden curator in 1991. She is the chair of the Bursary and Scholarship Selection Committee of the Ontario Parks Association Foundation, and a member of the Ontario Parks Association, Perennial Plant Association, the Herb Society of America, the Ontario Horticulture Education Council, Landscape Ontario, the Professional Landcare Network, and the Alumni Association of The Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture Foundation.

Co-author of two gardening books, *Roses for Ontario* and *Best Garden Plants for Ontario*, Klose is also a regular contributor to print media. She is a frequent guest speaker at schools and industry associations, and for local, provincial and international garden and horticultural societies.

The Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens and School of Horticulture is located in Niagara Falls. The Niagara Parks Commission is an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism that has operated at no cost to taxpayers since 1885.

• www.schoolofhorticulture.com 🌿

Greenhouse Canada photo



School superintendent Liz Klose, with students Amy Doan (at left) and Sarah Wilson (at right) in one of the Niagara Parks Commission display greenhouses.