

William Chandley English

When I received the call from Mrs. Debi Aker saying that I was lucky enough to receive the Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Scholarship, I was actually working in a small greenhouse on campus growing *Populus* trees that they used for biofuel research. And I was fresh out of a small greenhouse/nursery operation where I spent my summer. I believe that far too often when students go on internships, they choose to go to incredible destinations rather than incredible businesses. So I completely blocked the location and simply looked at the greenhouse operation. And when I stumbled upon Metrolina's website within the list on the AFE's website, it was like seeing greenhouses again for the first time.

I had many expectations for Metrolina: a mind blowing scale and innovative technology. However, no amount of mental preparation could have readied me for the learning curve. Metrolina is this beautiful cocktail of chlorophyll, logistics, environmental awareness, and art stirred into one entity. The first month, I could feel the G-forces on my chest as if I was an astronaut being launched into orbit. But the growing team did an excellent job assisting me in the transition. I worked in the MX2 greenhouse under Chris Holhouser, the head grower. Chris was always willing to help me with anything and always took the chance to teach. He never ceased to impress me with his intelligence. I learned a lot from Chris about not only growing plants, but everything else in a greenhouse. He would stop his scooter and start the conversation by asking "how's it growing?" and test me about my plants or keep my brain on its toes. One of my last days was spent just shadowing him and I learned so much about greenhouse structures and Argus. The grower that I worked directly under was a Columbian man named Johnny. He was by far one of the best teachers I have ever had

the pleasure of being under. His passion for plants overflowed. He taught me about bugs (what he studied at a university in his home country), Spanish, plants, chemicals, and how to buy a proper flat screen television. He was easily excited and gifted me many phrases such as “where I can find you”, “be careful, your goodwill is showing,” and one time went out of his way to remind me “William, supervise your plants!” I wouldn’t have traded working for these two men for the world.

My days at Metrolina always varied. I always started the day checking my acres to see what needed irrigation, and then watched to make sure that the watering systems worked correctly. That would be completed around ten in the morning. Then we would do our weekly tasks of recording mum or poinsettia heights, putting out sticky card, and reading said cards. The rest of my day was spent doing chores or tasks for the day. The summer afternoons were spent drenching mums, snapdragons and whatnot. Johnny liked to keep his section clean so I spent a lot of time maintaining proper cleanliness both in the bays and the walkways. I also pinched plants, pulled weeds, and just generally maintained quality plants across my section. I assisted Chris in two dianthus PGR tests (trying to bulk without a pinch) by spraying them and documenting them. I also designed and implemented a six week study of the flood irrigation system on poinsettias that occupied a good portion of my time.

The living condition was fine. I lived in the boy’s intern house that was very close to the greenhouse. My roommates were all international interns except when Jason (the other Ball inter) lived there during the summer months. I would describe the living conditions as ok. I had absolutely no problems with the house, however, it should be noted that my previous living conditions have been in a freshman dorm, a fraternity house, and a loft, so I am comfortable with pretty much any type of living conditions.

This internship has done an incredible job preparing me for my future. I learned so much about growing plants and logistics. No matter what area in horticulture I end up, the skills I gained from my internship at Metrolina will make me a better employee. I would recommend taking internships no matter the location because of the real world skills that you gain that you just cannot get in a classroom setting. After graduation, I intend to continue working in the green industry and moving up the degree ladder. I have the intention of becoming a professor later in life.