Surpassing $20 Million in Funding in Support of Floriculture

We are proud to announce a significant milestone in our journey to support the future of floriculture: Providing over $20 million in cumulative funding for industry research and education.

Since AFE’s establishment in 1961, we have been at the forefront of funding innovative research, providing educational grants for industry events and programs, and offering internships and scholarships to cultivate the next generation of professionals in the floral sector. These endeavors have not only enriched the industry but also propelled its growth and advancement.

continued on page 3

The Larimers: Giving Back to an Industry that Found Them

We have newly launched a quarterly program to spotlight donors as well as regular articles highlighting the impactful industry stories of our Legacy Circle members.

Our Legacy Circle is an honorary organization composed of persons who have made provision for a planned gift to AFE through a bequest, a life insurance policy, a trust or otherwise, such as a retirement plan beneficiary designation. The Legacy Circle affords AFE an opportunity to extend our warm appreciation to individuals who notify us of their thoughtful gift intentions.

As a part of these spotlights, we recognize Dwight and Dawn Larimer for their impact on the industry. We welcome you to read about their journey and their crucial role in AFE’s mission.

continued on page 8
About AFE
AFE’s Mission Statement
To be the trusted source and catalyst for floriculture advancement through funding of innovative research, scholarships, internships, and educational grants that best serve the dynamic needs and demographics of all industry sectors.

The AFE Bulletin is proudly sponsored by the Todd Bachman Memorial Fund.
Todd Bachman served as Chairman and CEO of Bachman’s before his untimely death in 2008. Todd was a past chairman of the American Floral Endowment and was very active in many state and national industry organizations. Those who knew him will always remember what a great communicator he was and his outstanding leadership and devotion to work and family. His wife and daughters are honored to carry on his legacy.

Coming Soon!
Introducing Two New Websites: endowment.org and sustainabloom.org

www.endowment.org

www.sustainabloom.org
Surpassing $20 Million in Funding in Support of Floriculture

continued from page 1

Debi Chedester, Executive Director of AFE, expressed gratitude for this achievement, stating, “We are proud to have reached this significant milestone. It is truly a testament to the continuous support and generosity of our dedicated donors over the last six decades. Their contributions have enabled us to reinvest and uplift the floral community through impactful programs, invaluable resources, and crucial funding.”

Recently, we released a brand new Thrips and Botrytis Research Library, equipping growers with essential guides and resources to combat persistent flower pests and diseases. Additionally, we’re preparing to launch Sustainabloom, a new project aimed at bolstering sustainable practices within floriculture, addressing the industry’s evolving needs and challenges.

Looking ahead, we will debut a fully redesigned website in the coming months, catering to the evolving demands of the industry. This revamped online platform will offer a wealth of resources and opportunities tailored to every segment of floriculture, ensuring enhanced accessibility and user experience.

Contributions to AFE play a pivotal role in addressing emerging challenges and sustaining the Endowment’s vital programs. By supporting AFE, donor contributions join together to support industry advancements, fostering resilience, empowerment, and sustainability.

Ken Young, Chairman of AFE, expressed gratitude to donors in a recent video (scan the QR below to watch), affirming, “We thank you for your commitment to the Endowment. Your support enables us to fund research and initiatives that drive industry advancement and nurture our future leaders.”

This milestone reaffirms our steadfast commitment to floriculture. As we embark on another promising year of funding groundbreaking research, offering internships and scholarships, and facilitating educational opportunities, we remain dedicated to fostering collaboration and innovation within the industry.

If you’d like to support continued advancement and programs, consider making a tax-deductible contribution to AFE at endowment.org/donate.
Sponsorship opportunities are available.

All webinars are FREE and open to anyone in the industry – thanks to our generous sponsors!

Our nationally recognized researchers, hosts, and speakers offer ‘how-to’ advice based on AFE-funded and other research projects to help the industry navigate through ever-changing growing challenges.

Visit endowment.org/growpro to register for upcoming webinars and for access to previous webinars.

**UPCOMING WEBINARS!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JAN 16</td>
<td>Biorational Products for Botrytis Control</td>
<td>Dr. Melissa Muñoz, North Carolina State University</td>
<td>Mycorrhizal Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY 30</td>
<td>Preventing Undesirable Coloration on Cuttings Propagated Under LEDs</td>
<td>Dr. Roberto Lopez, Michigan State University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEB 27</td>
<td>Preparing for Parvispinus</td>
<td>Dr. Sarah Jandricic, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Rural Affairs</td>
<td>Mycorrhizal Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUG 20</td>
<td>Integrated Control of Thrips</td>
<td>Dr. Rose Buitenhuis, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre</td>
<td>Beneficial Insectary, BioWorks, Captiva Prime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAR 19</td>
<td>How to Manage Peat Shortages</td>
<td>Dr. Brian Schulker, Jiffy</td>
<td>Young Professionals Council (YPC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPT 17</td>
<td>Greenhouse Climate Strategies</td>
<td>Dr. Bruce Bugbee, Utah State University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APR 23</td>
<td>Biochar for Container Production</td>
<td>Dr. Ping Yu, University of Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY 21</td>
<td>Identification and Management of Root Diseases in Floriculture Crops</td>
<td>Dr. Francesca Hand, Ohio State University</td>
<td>Fenstop, BioWorks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE 18</td>
<td>The Use of Drones in Cut Flower Production</td>
<td>Dr. Christian Nansen, University of California Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCT 22</td>
<td>Success with Tissue Culture</td>
<td>Dr. Dayton Wilde, University of Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOV 19</td>
<td>Trends to Watch in 2025</td>
<td>Dr. Melinda Knuth, NC State University and Dr. Charlie Hall, Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>Ball Seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC 17</td>
<td>Fine-tune Your Greenhouse Controls for the Young Plant Season</td>
<td>Dr. Paul Fisher, University of Florida</td>
<td>Syngenta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sponsors noted as of 2/22/24
Spring Hiring Campaign Kicks Off to Tackle Labor Challenges

Help for Spring hiring is here! We are launching a Spring Hiring Campaign to tackle labor challenges in the floral industry. By promoting the trusted AFE Career Center, this initiative aims to connect employers and job-seekers during the busy season. This effort not only fills positions, but also builds the floral community through networking and collaboration.

The AFE Career Center provides valuable online career tools, resources, and industry guides tailored to both individuals seeking opportunities in the floral industry and employers looking to expand their staff. The Center provides the most up-to-date job listings, real-time job alerts, networking opportunities, and free tools to help both candidates and employers during the job search. Since its launch in 2020 by AFE, engagement has more than doubled in both job views and active applications.

Calling All Job Seekers!
Explore an array of resources including resume tips, reviews, and a centralized job openings hub at afecareercenter.com. Be entered to win 1 of 3 $50 Amazon gift cards by uploading your resume by April 23rd! Uploading your resume means employers can reach out to you directly with inquiries or offers.

Calling All Employers!
The AFE Career Center is a comprehensive platform to help streamline your hiring process. Connect with eligible employees, review resumes, and post job openings. As part of the Spring Hiring Campaign, take advantage of a special deal: Receive 24% off your job posting by using code SPRINGHIRES24 before April 23rd!

"As the AFE Career Center continues to flourish, it becomes a dynamic hub connecting numerous qualified candidates with employers," remarked Debi Chedester, AFE Executive Director. "This platform is more than just a job board; it’s our way of providing every possible resource for both those dreaming of a future in this vibrant field, and current companies struggling with labor issues."

With such a diverse array of opportunities within the industry, there’s undoubtedly a fitting role for every individual. The floriculture sector is expansive and continuously evolving, offering prospects that extend beyond traditional floral design or grower roles.

"I believe this tool is invaluable for both industry members and newcomers," emphasized Ken Young, Phoenix Flower Shop Owner and AFE Chairman.

Candidates of all backgrounds, experiences, and education levels are encouraged to upload their resumes and explore the diverse array of available positions. There’s a role for everyone in the floral industry.

Visit the AFE Career Center today at AFECareerCenter.com
Dr. Stephanie Burnett Appointed to AFE’s Vic & Margaret Ball Committee

Dr. Stephanie Burnett, Associate Professor at the University of Maine, has been appointed as the newest member of AFE’s Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Committee.

In her position at the University of Maine’s School of Food and Agriculture, she teaches Greenhouse Management, Herbaceous Landscape Plants, and Introduction to Horticulture. Her research focuses on greenhouse and field flower production as well as automated irrigation in greenhouses. She has an MS degree in horticulture from Auburn University and a Ph.D. in horticulture from the University of Georgia.

As a member of the Vic & Margaret Ball Committee, Burnett will work together with industry, faculty, AFE staff and the Ball Family representative to review student applications for the Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program and help promote the program to students. She will be helping the future generation of industry leaders to understand first-hand the lasting effects of this great program.

In 1992, Vic and Margaret Ball made a generous donation to AFE to establish this program to give students the opportunity to gain practical, hands-on floriculture/horticulture experience through a three-, four-, or six-month paid internship at a commercial production greenhouse or nursery. To date, hundreds of students have completed this program which has allowed them the opportunity and experience to better transition into the industry.

Dr. Burnett was first introduced to the Vic and Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship Program through her graduate advisors at the University of Georgia, Drs. Paul Thomas and Marc van Iersel who were both strong champions for AFE and education. She serves as a student advisor and has had several students complete the Vic and Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship program.

I look forward to serving on the selection committee and furthering my involvement in this impactful program. The experiences that the interns receive are invaluable and set them up for success in their careers in the industry,” notes Burnett.

To learn more about this program, the other internship opportunities, or to become a host employer, visit endowment.org/internships.

APPLICATION DEADLINES

Scholarships, Internships & Grants

MARCH 1
James & Helen Phillip Floral Design Grant
Mosmiller Internship
Vic & Margaret Ball Internship

MAY 1
Undergrad & Graduate Scholarships

JUNE 1
Educational Grants

AUGUST 1
Gus Poesch Research Grant
Scientific Research Proposals

OCTOBER 1
Arizona Retail Florist Grant
Mosmiller Internship
Retail Florist Continued Education Grant
Vic & Margaret Ball Internship
One of the joys of providing funding for the floral industry is hearing back from the recipients of AFE support, and seeing how it provided them with new and exciting experiences. Supporting the next generation is an ongoing priority for AFE and crucial to the industry’s ongoing success.

Juan Quijia Pillajo, member of our Young Professionals Council (YPC) and Graduate Research Associate at The Ohio State University, recently received a grant from the Gus Poesch Research Fund that allowed him to travel to the IV International Symposium on Organic Greenhouse Horticulture in Mexico.

While there, Juan had the opportunity to present his research during an educational seminar, learn more about controlled environmental horticulture, and connect with colleagues and friends, new and old!

The Gus Poesch Research Fund was established in honor of a true innovator and stimulator of research, and an influential educator and respected businessman, Gus Poesch. It is due to Gus’ dedication to supporting the next generation that the G. H. “Gus” Poesch Research Fund was established at The Ohio State University. Approximately $40,000 is awarded annually for recruitment, research, teaching, graduate student travel grants, or floriculture projects at The Ohio State University.

Read on to learn about Juan’s experience and see an excerpt from his current research project.

By Juan Quijia Pillajo

The IV International Symposium on Organic Greenhouse Horticulture took place in Cancún, México from October 22nd to 27th 2023. I had the opportunity to present part of my PhD research project conducted at The Ohio State University, Wooster campus. This unforgettable experience started with an exciting public bus ride around Cancún downtown on my way to the conference venue. The conference was a unique opportunity to learn about scientific and technological innovations in greenhouse horticulture and other controlled environment horticultural systems. I had the opportunity to present an oral seminar during one of the “Fertigation, water, and growing media” sessions. This was a fantastic opportunity to share ideas and discuss my project. I learned about a diversity of topics studied by scientists around the world and obtained constructive feedback about my project. I had the chance to meet amazing students and faculty working in controlled environment agriculture. I was super happy to find faculty from OSU and a friend from the AmericanHort Scholars’ program. My friend is now a professor in Florida, and I had the chance to get to know his undergraduate students and listen to their research project results.

We had the opportunity to learn about horticulture in the Yucatan Peninsula, its challenges, and how growers have adapted to market and climate changes. I visited an eggplant farm where production is completely open-field and soil conditions are very challenging. Beyond my wonderful scientific learning experience, I also learned a lot about Mexico and its culture. I visited Chichén Itzá (a UNESCO World Heritage site) and learned about Mayan culture. I loved visiting the natural rainforest ecosystem, more specifically the cenotes, natural freshwater pools. Attending the conference let me expand my knowledge about current and future perspectives in controlled environment horticulture and continue building a stronger professional network. I am deeply grateful for the support from the American Floral Endowment to attend this symposium.

Juan’s current research focuses on developing a screening pipeline for the identification of Phosphorus. You can read his full research abstract on AFE’s website. Applications for the Gus Poesch Research Fund are due to AFE no later than August 1 of each year. Young professionals interested in joining our YPC and networking with up-and-coming industry leaders, like Juan, can join for FREE at endowment.org.
The Larimers: Giving Back to an Industry that Found Them

continued from page 1

More than 2,500 miles separated Dwight and Dawn Larimer as they grew up on opposite sides of the country. Little did they know at the time that fate would bring the two together through an industry that has been pivotal in both their professional and personal lives.

That journey also allowed the Larimers to learn about the crucial work of the American Floral Endowment (AFE) and, together, become an ongoing part of the organization's mission.

For the two, floriculture has been the foundation of their past, and AFE's commitment to the industry now represents the future.

Planting the Seeds

The floral industry wasn’t something either of them had on their radar. Growing up in Rochester, New York, Dwight had pondered a career in rehabilitation psychology, but eventually settled on a business degree from the State University of New York in Albany. Meanwhile, Dawn, who was raised in eastern Washington, studied business administration and marketing at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. Her first glimpse of the floral industry came following graduation when a recruiter connected her with an interview.

“I ended up not getting that job, and I was so sad because I never even thought of the floral industry,” she said. “But when I got that interview, just the sound of it really made me want to work for that company and be in that industry.”

Her interest in the floral industry was piqued, and she eventually secured a marketing job with the Kirk Company Floral Division. It was her first taste of the industry, and she was hooked.

Dwight was working for a consulting company and was offered a job with one of the New York clients – the former W.J. Cowee, Inc., a leading manufacturer of wooden floral picks, plant stakes and other products that support the industry. Two years later in 1979, Dwight was the vice president of sales and marketing for the company and found himself becoming fully immersed in the industry.
Dwight and Dawn met in 1981, in Seattle during a Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA) convention. Both in marketing, their inner circles overlapped and brought commonality to a friendship that stretched from coast to coast.

By 1983, Dwight decided to continue his journey in the industry, joining Colorado Dye and Chemical, which would eventually become Design Master, a company that specializes in color sprays for floral and accessory products. His move to Boulder, Colorado to work for the company allowed him to further develop his expertise in the industry, this time becoming engrossed in the psychology of color and helping to elevate the industry as part of a company that produced dye technology in aerosols.

“Very suddenly, on March 12, 1984, the Kirk Company closed its floral division doors, so Dawn lost a job she dearly loved,” Dwight said. “To take her mind off of it, I suggested that she come to Colorado and visit. She did, and the rest is history.”

As their relationship progressed, Dawn would visit Dwight often until the decision was made to move there. She packed up her cat, her resume and her interview suit and set off for Colorado. While saddened to leave the floral industry, Dawn landed a job with Citicorp, a career opportunity she said she couldn’t pass up.

Securing the Future

The Larimers were married in 1986 and would go on to have two sons, both of whom graduated from the University of Colorado in Boulder and remain in the state. Garrett, now 35, is a new father to the couple’s first grandchild, Estelle Mae. Their son, Nicholas, 33, who is planning to marry in May, shares a birthday with one of the most important milestones in Dwight’s career.

“The day we had Nicholas was the day Dwight became president of Design Master,” Dawn said. “That was a big day in his life.”

Dwight’s promotion to the top of the company, seven short years after he was first hired there, was a result of his innovative, leading talent in the industry. He was instrumental in developing several initiatives for the company over the years, including the Color Concepts program, a partnership between Design Master and suppliers to foster the merchandising of products that complement the floral industry.

Throughout his career, Dwight drew from the knowledge and inspiration of others and shared his own wisdom through memberships to several national associations and serving on committees that fostered the future of the floral business world. He said his involvement with the AFE taught him early on in his career how to not only elevate the industry of today but find ways to secure it for the professionals of tomorrow.

“I have a home office that is full of plaques, and among them is my first AFE plaque from a phone-a-Thon held in 1994,” Dwight said. “That was my first touchpoint with AFE and being an ambassador for them. It was incredibly important to me to be part of nonprofit work that supported the industry as a whole.”

He would become even more involved with AFE, serving on the organization’s board of trustees since 2006, and serving as board chair from 2016-2018. He has served on the AFE’s Education, Floral Marketing Fund (FMF) and PR/Development committees. He co-founded AFE’s Young Professionals Council in 2015, serving as a board liaison to the group. He is the outgoing chair of AFE’s Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Committee, which connects undergraduate students to internships in floriculture production.
What Does Your Contribution Support?  
...Floral Industry Growth

For over 60 years, AFE has been the leading source of funding for floral industry advances through scientific research, scholarships, internship programs, and educational grant funding for continued education.

The future will continue to bring new challenges, and with your support, AFE can expand resources and programs through:

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

Working with leading floriculture researchers from universities across the U.S., AFE supports projects focused on improved quality, longevity, technologies, production, post-production, sustainability, care and handling, insect and disease management, and more.

“"If the employees of floral shops read and follow AFE’s Care and Handling posters, it will save the businesses a lot of money in the long run. This will ensure that the shops throw away less product.”

- John Smith, Manager of DWF Wholesale’s Toledo Branch

**WEBINARS, PRESENTATIONS, AND BEST PRACTICES**

Results and findings from AFE’s research, resources such as our monthly **Grow Pro Webinar Series**, Care & Handling Poster, Thrips & Botrytis Management Summaries, and more are provided to the industry to utilize the research directly in your businesses.

““I am so grateful for the gift of scholarship funding that AFE has granted my students. For many of our students, finances are a primary driver affecting their decision to pursue higher education.”

- Terry Lanker, Coordinator of Floral Design & Marketing Technology at Ohio State ATI

**SCHOLARSHIPS**

More than 30 annual scholarships are awarded each year to students enrolled in floriculture or horticulture programs. AFE provides more scholarships in floriculture than any other organization to help attract and retain young professionals to our industry.

““I am so grateful for the gift of scholarship funding that AFE has granted my students. For many of our students, finances are a primary driver affecting their decision to pursue higher education.”

- Terry Lanker, Coordinator of Floral Design & Marketing Technology at Ohio State ATI

**INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS**

AFE provides students with unique opportunities to gain hands-on experience while still enrolled in studies. Also bringing industry businesses new perspectives and potential employees. AFE administers three separate internship programs focused on production, floral/retail and wholesale operations, and business management.

““The interns we have hosted through our partnership with AFE have a passion for plants and have been very successful at our facilities. Their enthusiasm and dedication inspire our team, reminding us all why we are in this industry.”

- Ann Pennington, former HR Manager of Neal Mast Greenhouses
EDUCATIONAL GRANTS

Our grants support continued education for all industry members through state, national, and other industry-related programs nationwide. Through educational grant funding, AFE supports floral design events, certification programs, event sponsorships, and both in-person and virtual courses.

CAREER CENTER AND RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

Labor and recruitment continue to challenge our industry. The AFE Career Center – www.AFEcareercenter.com – provides a platform for job seekers and employers to connect and shares important resources to help you recruit top talent locally at the grass roots level.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS COUNCIL

Fostering programs for young professionals and students to network with peers and industry leaders is important to us. The YPC provides professional development opportunities for the next generation through webinars, meetings, volunteer opportunities, and other resources.

“AFE is one of the best, if not the best, supporter of young horticultural professionals that are on their journey to being upcoming leaders in the industry and academic settings.

– Annika Kohler, YPC Member

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Together with the industry, AFE works to create, fund, and deliver resources to address challenges at all levels and for all segments. With your input and engagement, we can continue to build a stronger, more sustainable industry today and for generations to come!

JOIN THE Friends of Floral!

For just $25 a month, industry members can come together to help ensure a bright and promising future for the floral industry. By becoming a Friend of Floral, you will truly make a huge impact by supporting all of the programs and resources listed above.

Join now by scanning the QR code to the right or visiting endowment.org!
As I sit here typing this article, I’m struggling to find the words to convey just how honored and excited I am to be leading the American Floral Endowment’s research program. I’m humbled to follow in the footsteps of the remarkable Dr. Terril Nell, and I know I have some big shoes to fill, quite literally! Since August 2022, I’ve had the privilege of working closely with Terril, whose dedication and passion have left an enduring mark on me, AFE, and the floral industry as a whole. I know that Terril has personally touched many of you reading this article. His mentorship and guidance have been invaluable, and I am profoundly grateful for the foundation he has laid. I am also extremely grateful to AFE for the significant amount of time I had to work with him before his retirement, which was crucial in setting me up for success in this role.

A little bit about me – since returning to school for horticulture (my first degree is in music performance!), I have been fortunate enough to work in a variety of positions that have guided me in understanding the multifaceted and multi-disciplinary nature of floriculture research. I’ve reared insects, cultured and identified pathogens, performed controlled crosses on a variety of ornamentals, measured ploidy levels, rescued embryos, micropropagated ornamentals, grown greenhouse crops, grown nursery crops, designed experiments, given numerous academic presentations and have written newsletters, book chapters, course curricula, website pages, and social media posts. I’ve also taught hundreds of students about plant identification and botany. I shouldn’t leave out the less glamorous horticultural tasks I know we’ve all done at some point – weeding, watering, deadheading, washing pots, digging holes, installing irrigation tape in the summer sun, and getting “arm day” in by lugging full 3-gallon pots around all day. Some other career highlights are leadership roles in the Pi Alpha Xi horticultural honor society as a student; graduate research awards through IPPS, Bayer, and the former SNA; being the current Secretary of the ASHS floriculture interest group (in 2025/2026, I’ll be the chair); and being inducted into GPN Magazine’s 40 under 40 class of 2023. I’ll admit that there were times I wondered if my background was too diverse, but now I know that it led me to the right place and gave me just the tools I needed for this position, which I am very passionate about.

All of that is not just to tell you about my background but to say that now, and throughout the entirety of my horticultural journey – AFE has been there. Whether it was the scholarship I received as a graduate student, funding that my friends’ advisors received to support their research programs, a specific task we were performing in the lab or greenhouse, or a research article I’ve shared with my students, AFE has directly impacted the people we know and the practices we implement in our industry. And not just recently - AFE has impacted the industry and has been the leading source for floriculture research and solutions for over 60 years. AFE research has advanced production practices, pest and disease management, post-harvest handling, cold-chain management, sustainability, technology advancements, and more. Much of the way flowers are grown and processed today is a direct result of AFE-funded research. That is an incredible feat and a source of inspiration to me as I look towards my future with AFE. I’m incredibly proud to be part of an organization that has accomplished so much for our industry.
The reason AFE has been able to do this for as long as it has is because of industry support. One of the things I admire most about Terril (and there are many things I admire) is his collaborative spirit. Under his leadership, AFE excelled at fostering a community of collaboration between industry professionals and academic researchers. I am just as committed to bridging the gap between industry needs and academic expertise. By fostering strong partnerships between industry stakeholders and academic researchers, we can ensure that our research efforts are not only relevant but also impactful. By listening to the voices of growers, distributors, retailers, and consumers, we can ensure that our research efforts are responsive to evolving needs and technological advances. Through open dialogue and shared goals, we can leverage the collective expertise of our community to address the most pressing challenges facing the floral industry today. Our research endeavors will continue to be guided by the overarching goal of driving positive (and profitable) change within the floral industry.

I am incredibly excited about the opportunities that lie ahead, and I look forward to working closely with the AFE Board of Directors, Research Committee, and our amazing staff to guide AFE’s research program. I also look forward to getting to know many of you. How can AFE help you? Research and progress do not exist in a vacuum, and I hope that you will reach out to me (lbarth@afeendowment.org) with any questions or feedback that you have. I would love to know the issues you face and how AFE can help you. Together, with the support of our dedicated community of researchers, industry partners, and stakeholders, I am confident that we can continue to drive meaningful progress and innovation within the floral industry and ensure that AFE remains the trusted source and catalyst for floriculture advancement for another 60+ years.

A memorial tribute has been established through the Endowment honoring industry leader and trailblazer Kenneth (Ken) Royer, AAF of Royer’s Flowers & Gifts, who passed away on December 14, 2023 at the age of 92.

Ken was one of the first florists in the country to implement computerized systems for multi-shop operations and was among the first florists to import flowers directly from South America. His business strategies were so successful that in 1998, he published the book, ‘Retailing Flowers Profitably,’ and held dozens of seminars on topics from marketing to management and post-harvest care. He also wrote a Florists’ Review magazine column, “Royer on Retail,” for 14 years.

Ken spoke at over 50 wire service and other florist meetings, providing educational sessions on marketing and business management. His management philosophy, ethic, and commitment to providing his customers with good value became part of not only the Royer’s team but thousands of retailers nationwide.

Outside of the family business, Ken actively volunteered his time and expertise. He served on several boards, including both AFE and the Society of American Florists (SAF). He served the Endowment for ten years as a board member, with six years as Treasurer from 1988 to 1994. To read the full tribute and make a donation in his honor, visit endowment.org.
Manipulating Light to Improve Quality of Cut Flowers

By Jessica Brown and Dr. Roberto Lopez, Department of Horticulture, Michigan State University

Producers are seeking information on how to schedule flowering of new and current cut flower varieties for year-round production. With this information, they will be able to successfully inhibit or induce flowering to schedule crops for specific market dates, increase yield, grow consistent and high-quality cut flowers year-round, and subsequently satisfy consumer demand for locally produced stems. In addition to this research, funded by AFE, Dr. Roberto Lopez recently hosted a Grow Pro Webinar covering Cut Flower Production in the Northern US, which can be viewed on AFE’s website and YouTube.

Once completed, this research will provide growers with well-defined recommendations for vegetative and reproductive growth to increase cut flower production efficiency and profitability. Specifically, we are quantifying how several new and commercially important cut flower varieties respond to daylength and/or vernalization temperature and duration to ultimately determine how these environmental parameters should be managed to hasten flower initiation and induction without negatively impacting stem quality and yield. This information is especially crucial for cut flower growers located in northern latitudes as they transition to year-round greenhouse production.

Bluebeard (Caryopteris × clandonensis) and Billy button (Pycnosorus globosus) are both crops that have been recently introduced as cut flowers, however, there is very little production and flower induction information available. These crops have the potential to be high-value fillers as their morphology complements and is distinct from traditional cut flowers. Our research with bluebeard and Billy button has determined the critical daylengths for floral initiation. Additionally, we have determined the daylength(s) that will hasten flower induction and lead to a consistent supply of high-quality stems.

Persian Buttercup (Ranunculus asiaticus) is a staple and high-value cut flower; however, few growers are able to schedule this cool season crop to meet specific market dates. As this crop becomes increasingly popular with consumers, growers are looking to hasten flowering, and increase yield and stem consistency between successive plantings. Although field and high tunnel ranunculus production research has been previously conducted, there are contradictions and gaps in knowledge regarding environmental triggers for flower initiation and induction and vegetative growth prior to induction to increase yield and stem length. In addition to photoperiod, this research has also determined how vernalization temperature and duration of rehydrated ranunculus corms after transplant hastens flowering and stem quality.

Summary of research conducted:

1. Caryopteris and Pycnosorus
   The first replication of our bluebeard and Billy button photoperiod research has been completed.

   Cuttings of Bluebeard ‘Pagoda Lagoon’ and Billy button PaintballTM ‘Globe’ were received and rooted. The rooted young plants were subsequently transplanted into bulb crates filled with a peat and perlite-based substrate. Crates were placed under eight different lighting treatments, including a 9-, 10-, 11-, 12-, 13-, 14-, 16h photoperiod, or a 4-h night interruption (NI) from 10 pm to 2 am.

   Plants were monitored daily for the presence of visible buds (VB) and open flowers (OF). The number of nodes below the VB and the date was recorded. Stems were also monitored until they reached a marketable stage when they were harvested. Stem length, caliper, and inflorescence diameter were measured, and the number of branches was recorded.

   We determined that flowering of bluebeard was hastened under a 9- and 10-h photoperiod (Figure 1). However, these stems were not considered marketable as the majority were shorter than 40 cm in length and internodes between flower buds were very short. Plants grown under 11-, 12-, 13-, and 14-h photoperiods produced marketable stems >40 cm. While plants under the 16-h photoperiod and 4-h NI initiated flower buds, buds did not ever fully develop over the duration of the study (Figure 1). For Billy button, flower bud initiation
and induction were similar across all photoperiods (Figure 2). Billy button stem length was greatest under 11-, 12-, 13-, and 14-h photoperiods. Additionally, plants grown under the shorter daylengths exhibited more branching.

This research is beneficial to growers interested in introducing new cut flowers into their product line. We are classifying bluebeard as a day-neutral plant for flower induction and a short-day plant for flower development as only plants under ≤14-h flowered and Billy button as a day neutral plant for both induction and initiation.

2. Ranunculus

The first replication of our ranunculus photoperiod and vernalization study has been recently completed. Ranunculus corms ‘La Belle White’, ‘Tecolote Salmon’, and ‘Butterfly Artemis’ were received and rehydrated in running 20 °C (68 °F) water for 8 h before being planted into trays. The trays were then placed in a 4.5 °C (40 °F) cooler for a 4-week pre-sprout period. Trays were then placed in vernalization treatments of 3.5, 5.0, or 7.5 °C (38, 41, or 45.5 °F) for 0, 2 or 3 weeks. Sprouted corms were then transplanted into crates and placed under 12-, 14-, or 16-h photoperiods.

Ranunculus plants were monitored for VB and OF, when the stem was harvested and considered marketable. Stem length and caliper were measured and the number of lateral branches with flower buds was recorded. The total number of marketable stems per plant was also recorded. It was observed that time to OF was hastened under the 16-h photoperiod, while those under the 12-h photoperiod were delayed. However, plants grown under the 12-h photoperiod were larger and more vegetative than plants grown under the 14- and 16-h photoperiods. The larger plants produced flowers with generally more and longer stems. We are currently analyzing our data to determine the influence of vernalization duration and temperature.

This information is valuable for ranunculus growers because it will provide recommendations for vernalization temperature and duration and photoperiod for flower initiation and induction. Growers will directly benefit from optimized production and an increased yield.

Objectives for the upcoming year:

To replicate the blue beard, Billy button, and ranunculus photoperiod studies and include additional series and cultivars to ensure that different series and varieties respond similarly.

To quantify if vernalized ranunculus plants should be grown under a 9-h short-day prior to inductive long-days to encourage vegetative growth and the production of more and longer stems.

To quantify the minimum number of short-days required to hasten flowering of dahlia grown under long-day conditions.

Significance to Industry

This research will provide information for growers seeking to schedule cut flowers that either have a short-day (SD) or long-day (LD) flowering response for year-round production. It will also emphasize the importance and utility of supplemental and photoperiodic lighting for the cultivation of high-quality cut flowers during the winter and early spring. With this information readily available, growers will be able to successfully schedule and grow consistent and high-quality new and current cut flowers year-round, and subsequently satisfy consumer demand.
WAYS TO SUPPORT ADVANCEMENTS THROUGH AFE

The Endowment stands as a beacon of support and advancement for the floral industry. Embrace the opportunity to give back to the floral industry by supporting programs and research that nurture the growth of skilled floriculture professionals and strengthen the industry that brings joy and beauty to countless lives.

ONLINE, DIRECT MAIL, AND GIFT PLEDGES

FRIENDS OF FLORAL

STOCK TRANSFER, IRA DISTRIBUTIONS, DONOR ADVISED FUNDS, ANNUITIES

ESTATE AND LEGACY PLANNING

Organizations can actively participate in supporting cutting-edge research, empowering the next generation of floriculture leaders, and advancing sustainable practices within the industry.

ANNUAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

EMPLOYEE MATCHING GIFT PROGRAM

CREATE A LEGACY NAMED FUND

LIVING TRIBUTE FUNDS AND MEMORIAL TRIBUTE FUNDS

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE OF FLORAL TOGETHER