MSU Students Tour California Horticulture and Compete at PLANET Student Career Days

By Brad Rowe, Associate Professor, MSU Department of Horticulture

During the last week of March, en route to compete at PLANET (Professional Landcare Network) Student Career Days at the Pomona campus of California Polytechnic State University, a group of MSU students and faculty experienced a dose of California horticulture by driving down the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles.
While in San Francisco, we drove across the Golden Gate Bridge, hiked to the top of the mountains just north of the bridge, visited The Strybing Arboretum and the Japanese Garden in Golden Gate Park, and viewed the green roof on the California Academy of Sciences. As we drove south along the coast on Highway One, we went through Santa Cruz, walked around on Pebble Beach, had lunch with Clint Eastwood in Carmel, hugged a few giant redwood trees, and enjoyed the vistas along Big Sur. On arrival in San Luis Obispo, the Cal Poly SLO PLANET team hosted us for a BBQ and tour of their arboretum. While in the San Luis Obispo area, we toured Sommers Wholesale Nursery, Tablas Creek Vineyard and Winery, and Greenheart Farms (a vegetable and ornamental plug producer). During the trip south to Los Angeles we also experienced fields of artichokes, strawberries, and other salad greens, as well as almond, citrus, and olive orchards. It was an educational experience for all.

When we arrived in LA it was time for PLANET Student Career Days. The four-day event consisted of training workshops, a career fair, and competitions among students enrolled in horticulture and landscape programs from colleges and universities across the country. Teams participated in an array of 26 contests covering the business and technical aspects of the landscape industry. Competitive events included Annual and Perennial Identification, Arboriculture Techniques, Business Management, Compact Excavator Operation, Compact Utility Loader Operation, Construction Cost Estimating, Exterior Landscape Design, Interior Landscape Design, Interior Plant Identification, Irrigation Assembly, Irrigation Design, Irrigation Troubleshooting, Landscape Plant Installation, Leadership Skills, Maintenance Cost Estimating,
Maintenance Equipment Operation, Paver Installation, Pest Management, Safety Management, Sales Presentation, Skidsteer Operation, Truck and Trailer Operation, Turf and Turf Pest Identification, Wood Construction, and Woody Plant Identification. These events are directly related to the skills necessary in the horticulture/landscape contracting industry and validate what we are teaching at MSU. The knowledge and experience gained in preparing and competing can only add to the professionalism of our industry.

This year’s competition involved 753 students representing 59 colleges and universities (sort of a national championship in landscape horticulture). In total, there were about 1,300 attendees consisting of students, faculty, and industry personnel. In the competitive events, MSU finished 14th nationally. The MSU team was composed of 14 members of the Horticulture Club from the Departments of Horticulture, Landscape Architecture, Plant Biology, and the Institute of Agricultural Technology. Team members included Matt Chansler, Racheal Climer, Joel Franken, Tim Gray, Dan Greiner, Bill Holdsworth, Zeke Kadish, Linnette Kanitz, Jason Karle, Tamara Keene, Jamey Martinez, Theresa Miller, Jim Moylan, Crystal Walton, and team coaches Brad Rowe, Bert Cregg, Tom Fernandez, and Marcus Duck (in absentia because he is now the father of two newborn baby ducks).
Top MSU performances in individual events included:

- Jim Moylan, Irrigation Design (1st)
- Team of Jim Moylan and Joel Franken, Irrigation Assembly (4th)
- Crystal Walton, Leadership Skills (4th)
- Jim Moylan, Irrigation Troubleshooting (6th)
- Zeke Kadish, Compact Excavator Operation (6th)
- Bill Holdsworth, Business Management (8th)
- Team of Jason Karle and Jamey Martinez, Landscape Maintenance Operations (9th)
- Team of Zeke Kadish and Joel Franken, Truck and Trailer Operation (9th)
- Team of Joel Franken and Tim Gray, Paver Installation (10th)
- Zeke Kadish, Compact Utility Loader Operation (10th)
- Crystal Walton, Safety Management (11th)
- Crystal Walton, Pest Management (13th)
Top scorers for MSU were Jim Moylan (336 points), Joel Franken (334 points), Crystal Walton (281 points), Zeke Kadish (272 points), and Matt Chansler (237 points). Special congratulations to Jim Moylan and Linnette Kanitz for being awarded PLANET scholarships worth $1,000.

Team members worked diligently all year raising money to finance the trip through Horticulture Club activities. Fundraisers included growing pumpkins during the summer for sale last fall and their annual Spring Show and Plant Sale. From their own hard work, the students raised $20,000 to finance the trip. With a team composed of mostly underclassmen, MSU has the framework for a strong team to compete next year in Atlanta.

Brad Rowe’s general research interests include propagation and production of landscape plants and their proper use in the landscape. Specific research emphasis is green roof technology.