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| **Candidate for the ILCA Board of Directors:  Contractor and Garden Center Director**  **Michael Massat**  **Professional Experience:**   * Co-Owner, The Growing Place, Naperville and Aurora Il, 2022 -present * General Manager, The Growing Place, Aurora Il, 2008 – 2022 * Sales, The Growing Place, Aurora Il, 2005 – 2008   **Education (High school, college, or specialized training or certificate programs):**   * Neuqua Valley HS, Naperville, Il * Associate of Applied Science, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Il * Continuing Education through Morton Arboretum, IGIA, Cultivate/OFA   **ILCA and Green Industry Activities (Committee service, awards won, educational or technical**  **presentations, etc.):**   * IGIA Board of Directors 2021-23 * Participant and presenter at InVigorateU * Garden Center University 2008 * Financial Basics of Garden Center Retailing 2020   **Message to ILCA Members:**  I am excited to be considered to serve on the newly unified ILCA Board of Directors. My time as a board member at IGIA was eventful and took some exciting turns that I was proud to help IGIA navigate.  I like many in our industry have grown up from within, spending time at the stores throughout my childhood and helping on the landscaping crew starting in my teens. I learned early on the extreme amount of time and dedication that all those in our industry put into their positions and businesses. Over the past 18 years I’ve built a career at The Growing Place. Starting from just doing sales and repairs at minimum wage, to managing the Aurora retail store and production greenhouses. I’ve enjoyed sharing skills and tools with employees as well as creative problem solving to ease work and productivity.  It is truly awe-inspiring to see the ingenuity and creativity that comes from all of our colleagues across the green industry and I hope that I can bring that into service on the board. My sister and I purchased the company from our parents officially in 2021. Since then we have been working hard to implement new ideas from the staff and I am always looking for more. I would love to about new ideas from any of our members and will work towards including those into making ILCA even better into the future. | |
| **Candidate for the ILCA Board of Directors:  Contractor and Garden Center Director**  **Adam Bellas**  **Professional experiences:**   * Co-owner of Bellas Landscaping, Bloomington, IL (2003-current)   **Education:**   * Heartland Community College   **Message to ILCA Members:**  I was first exposed to traditional landscaping through an agriculture course in high school where we covered plant identification and general small landscape design. I used these courses to jumpstart my interests and career in the green industry. My twin brother and I started mowing and doing small tasks for customers during high school, but this grew into a real company while I was attending Heartland Community College, when the business was employing 20-25 in-field staff.  As the business grew, I did manual work, fixed trucks and equipment, and learned how to get quality materials and reliable suppliers. I applied what I learned in school to partnering with banks, an accountant, budgeting, and learning everything from start to finish. While attending college, we purchased some commercial land, demolished existing buildings and built an office and shop. Soon, additional buildings were added to hold vehicles, equipment and supplies. We celebrated 20 years in business this year.  I received the Heartland Community College Distinguished Alumni Award in 2016 with my twin brother, Justin.  I have been a firefighter for the Allin Township volunteer fire department since 2014. We work with adjacent townships for structure fires, brush fires, accidents and all types of emergencies.  Justin and I joined in the leadership of a microbrewery. We bought the building, designed and built a kitchen and taproom, expanded the patio and created a family-friendly environment. We are known for hosting and supporting fundraising events such as Easter Seals, the Fire Protection District, retirement parties, and trivia nights. We were able to use our business expertise to grow the brewery into a fun destination for great beer and food.  This year we worked with volunteers and the Allin Township Village Park District to revitalize the baseball field in Stanford, which had been unused for almost 20 years. The infield was hidden by grass, and our landscaping equipment was used to dig out and replace the entire infield. We worked with suppliers to source and deliver the infield mix. The fence was painted, a grant supplied lumber for the new dugouts built by volunteer tradesmen, concrete was poured, and gates were added. The park district acquired new bleachers and the league supplied bases and a chalk machine. Now kids can stay in town and play instead of commuting 20 miles to practice and play games. It is gratifying to see a small village have a nice place and improved park for everyone to enjoy.  It is an honor to be considered to serve on ILCA Board of Directors. I started a landscaping company from the ground up in central Illinois, and have spent the last 20 years building up our trade and supporting our community. I look forward to working through the challenges and opportunities of landscaping in Illinois, while learning from the members of ILCA. | |
| **Candidate for the ILCA Board of Directors:**  **Supplier Director**  **Nikki Melin**  **Professional Experience:**   * Sales Operations Manager, Midwest Groundcovers, St Charles, IL 2017-present * Outside Sales Manager, Midwest Groundcovers, St Charles, IL 2012-2017 * Inside Sales / Internal Distribution / Inventory, Midwest Groundcovers, St Charles, IL 2008-2012   **Education (High school, college, or specialized training or certificate programs):**   * Bachelor of Science in Horticulture / Urban Forestry, University of Illinois, Champaign / Urbana 2004 - 2008 * Master in Business Administration (MBA), University of Illinois, Champaign / Urbana 2017 - 2020   **ILCA and Green Industry Activities (Committee service, awards won, educational or technical**  **presentations, etc.):**   * ILCA WNG Mentee – Spring Session 2023 * IGIA Board of Directors 2021 – 2023 * ILCA Experience Committee 2018 - 2021 * GPN Magazine 40 Under 40 - 2020   **Message to ILCA Members:**  I am very appreciative and honored to be considered for an ILCA Board of Directors seat. My passion for plants started when I was very young, when I grew up around a jungle of house plants that my mom meticulously cared for. That passion resurfaced in college, when I decided my initial career ambitions of being a Veterinarian were not for me, so I pivoted in to learning about trees and plants, choosing a major in Urban Forestry. I interned at public gardens during college – Morton Arboretum & Millennium Park – learning all about the hard work of garden maintenance. After college, I wasn’t quite sure how I wanted to use my degree so I took the direction of my advisor, Dr. Gary Kling, and went to go work for a large nursery.  My time with Midwest Groundcovers has been one of constant learning. While I tried to figure out what my “forever career” would be, I worked multiple jobs within Midwest. Graduating college at the beginning of the Great Recession, I saw Midwest Groundcovers adapt to many economic challenges. While it was hard, I am so glad I had that experience as it allowed me to work multiple jobs and wear many hats, during some of the most challenging business times we have ever seen. I experienced working in Sales, Inventory, Shipping & Distribution and I got to work on some very large projects like revamping our entire internal distribution process. Moving into management is where I found my true passion – getting to help people build successful careers in the green industry and getting to teach people about plants every day! The last 6 years, I have been the Sales Operations Manager for Midwest Groundcovers. I currently oversee Sales, Marketing, Yard Operations and Shipping. I have been heavily involved in 3 rounds of strategic planning and sit on our leadership team, helping drive decision making for the long-term health of the company.  Outside of Midwest, I have enjoyed serving our industry in a few ways. The ILCA Experience Committee was extremely fun and fulfilling. Planning a trade show that brings us all together for education and networking was amazing. I also served on the Illinois Green Industry Association Board of Directors for their final few years and assisted in the decision to unify with ILCA. I strongly believe that bringing the two organizations together and all the wonderful people that work for and volunteer for them will make for one very powerful and influential organization. I am very excited to have the opportunity to continue to serve our industry and all the landscape contractors and suppliers that make it successful. Thank you for your consideration to serve our industry and join the ILCA Board of Directors. | |
| **Candidate for the ILCA Board of Directors:**  **Supplier Director**  **Becky Thomas**  **Professional Experience:**  Becky owns and operates Spring Grove Nursery, a wholesale tree nursery that took root in 1999. Working with her husband, Jamie, she used their expertise in the landscape and recreation fields to expand their 6th generation family farm into nursery production. At 100 acres just south of the Chicagoland suburbs, SGN specializes in a diverse and superior mix of field-grown Shade, Ornamental, and Evergreen trees. The large balled & burlapped trees are sold to Landscape Contractors, Municipalities, Park Districts, Landscape Architects, and Independent Garden Centers across the state.  **Education:**   * B.A. in Landscape Architecture from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign * Executive Academy for Growth & Leadership (EAGL) program, a horticultural business certificate program at Texas A&M University   **ILCA & Green Industry Activities:**   * Past President of Illinois Green Industry Association * Past President of Ornamental Grower’s Association of Northern Illinois * Current Member ILCA Grower’s Committee * Past Member IGIA Public Policy Committee * Past Member Compeer Financial Nominating Committee & Client Advisory Board * Current Member of AmericanHort * Current Member of CRTI Trees and Green Infrastructure Work Group * Current WBE Certification with WBENC, IL BEP, IDOT   **Message to ILCA Members:**  The future of the Green Industry brings forth many opportunities and bright spots to look for. Within the last few years there has been an uptick in individuals and families starting gardens and engaging in the outdoors in new ways. With economic and societal uncertainty, many people have found solace in the self-sufficiency that comes with growing their own food and spending time outdoors enjoying the green spaces we all work to create. The aspect of community that comes with this new engagement brings greater chances for education and awareness as to all that our Green Industry encompasses and can be. There is great opportunity going forward to engage people who are looking for that connection and to continue to support those who are already doing the work of growing and leading us onward toward a more connected and sustainable future.  With that spirit of connection and community, I believe that I would bring many assets to the ILCA Board of Directors. During the EAGL professional certificate program I completed, we spent time examining our strengths through Gallup Strengthsfinder workshops. Ones that stood out for me were the strengths of Connectedness, Strategic Thinking, Communication, Ideation, and Input. Through examining these categories I learned, and affirmed, that I have an interest in bringing people together, learning and sharing new ideas, and thinking strategically about what to do and where to go next. Through my past experiences on different Boards of Directors I bring with me an expertise of leadership and collaboration in all I do. I enjoy meeting new people and hearing their stories all while sharing my own. I believe that through building authentic relationships the best and most efficient work gets done.  I bring with me an eagerness to learn and grow professionally, as well. As the owner and operator of my own business I have learned a lot over the years about finances, executive decision making, and overseeing employees and business operations. I want to continue to learn more about how our association can best tangibly support Green Industry businesses. As our nursery grows and adapts to the needs of our customers, I always want to improve our business and diversify our operation in ways that work for our whole team. I seek to guide our newly merged ILCA & IGIA associations with that same focus and energy.  In keeping with the spirit of the core values at Spring Grove Nursery of stewardship, hard work and perseverance, honesty and integrity, simplicity, and diversity, joining the ILCA Board of Directors would be in line with being a part of an organization that does good work in communities across the state. When we started our nursery in 1999, the first thing we did was join both ILCA & IGIA (then INA). We have seen lots of changes over the years in both our industry and each association. Now that both of these organizations have come together, we are embarking on a unique and historic time for the Green Industry in Illinois to grow stronger together. I value how much of a core partner ILCA & IGIA have been to my nursery business over the years, and I want to continue that work and partnership in the years to come. I look forward to the opportunity to serve all of our Green Industry businesses and grow together! |