

Former AHS Interns Forge Successful Careers

BY JACQUELYN FRANZ, FORMER EDITORIAL INTERN

For decades, the American Horticultural Society (AHS) has educated and encouraged gardeners across the country to engage with the environment in an intentional, sustainable way. That includes developing future green industry professionals through editorial and horticultural internships at AHS headquarters at River Farm in Alexandria, Virginia. Editorial interns contribute to *The American Gardener*, and horticultural interns work hands-on in the River Farm gardens. We recently reached out to five former interns from the last 20-plus years to see where they are now, and find out how interning at AHS played a part in their professional trajectory.



LAKEN BURNS Editorial Intern, Spring 2019

A self-described extrovert and lover of plants, Laken Burns interned with *The American Gardener* after graduating from West Virginia University with a major in horticulture and a minor in creative writing. “To combine writing and horticulture had always been a dream of mine,” she says. As an intern, Laken participated in the entire process of taking an article from concept to publication.

Today, she shares her knowledge with a range of visitors as a display horticulturist at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh. Interning at AHS “allowed me to cultivate my passion, if you’ll excuse the pun,” says Laken, “and fostered a sense of internal motivation that has proven very beneficial to my career.”



EVA MONHEIM Editorial Intern, Fall 2002 & Spring 2003

Since her time as an editorial intern, Eva Monheim has worn many hats professionally—which is exactly how she likes it. Eva came to River Farm with a passion for the land instilled in her by generations of growers, including grandparents who farmed in Eastern Europe. Eva’s love of writing stretches back to her childhood as well, when she crafted and illustrated mini books and kept diaries. At AHS, Eva learned to navigate timing in the publishing industry, and to track trends and horticultural movements.

Today, Eva teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia, and owns the business Verdant Earth Educators, a company that educates grounds maintenance crews, garden coaches, and landscape managers. She also co-hosts the award-winning *The Plant a Trillion Trees Podcast*, is a published author, and creates paintings inspired by the natural world. “I love the balance of teaching, writing, and being in the field,” she says. “Each day is an adventure.”



SYLVIA SCHMEICHEL

Horticultural Intern, Summer 2010

Sylvia Schmeichel was a horticultural intern who later returned to River Farm full-time from 2011 to 2017 as a staff horticulturist. Interning at AHS allowed her to network with professionals across the green industry; she even met the authors of her college textbooks, Stephen Still and Allan Armitage.

Today, Sylvia is a lead horticulturist with the Smithsonian Gardens in Washington, D.C., where she curates and maintains the garden areas surrounding the National Museum of Natural History. “The gardens are a reflection of the museum experience,” Sylvia explains. Because the natural history museum is the most popular of the museums in the Smithsonian complex— with an estimated four-plus million visits in 2023—her work is enjoyed by a lot of people from all over the world every year.

NEEL PATEL Fall 2012 Editorial Intern, Summer 2013 Horticultural Intern

Most AHS interns have intersecting interests in writing and horticulture, but Neel Patel took that to a whole new level when he worked as both an editorial intern and a horticultural intern. Neel originally planned to pursue a career in biology but quickly discovered that his talents were in writing rather than in lab work. A mentor suggested that he consider science writing. As an editorial intern, Neel was encouraged to bring his own scientific interests to the magazine, enabling him to write about the environment, urban architecture, and sustainability. As a horticultural intern, he was able to gain experience interacting with the natural world.

Today, Neel is an editor in the Health & Sciences department of the *New York Times*. He says that by bringing texture to a story, challenging preconceived notions, or making an argument to inform readers, he can help “bridge the gap between the scientific space and the public space,” making scientific research more accessible to curious readers.



VIVEKA NEVELN Editorial Intern, Fall 2004

Viveka Neveln was a freelance writer and part time editor in the Midwest prior to her internship. When she discovered an opportunity to join her editorial skills with her love of gardening as an intern with *The American Gardener*, she seized it. While at AHS, Viveka expanded her knowledge of hor-



ticulture and started networking with garden communicators across the country. After her internship, Viveka joined the editorial staff of *The American Gardener*, where she made major contributions to the publication and other parts of the AHS for 14 years.

Today, she continues sharing her passion for plants and gardening as a senior editor for the *Better Homes & Gardens* website. “My

favorite thing about it is being able to create high quality content to help our readers be better gardeners,” she says. Viveka credits the small staff at AHS with teaching her not only about publishing and horticulture but also memorable life lessons. Viveka says many of her former coworkers remain dear friends.



As a horticultural intern in 2013, Neel spent the summer with fellow interns helping maintain the gardens at AHS headquarters at River Farm.