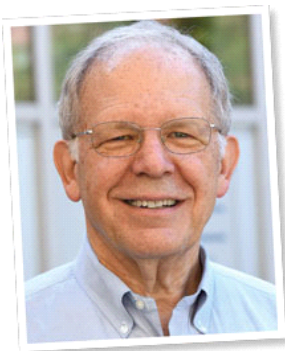


6/30/2025

## Now, the Good News

Bill McCurry



Bill McCurry

A pleasant discovery was unveiled among this year's Young Retailer Finalists. What came through—beyond horticultural knowledge and insights—was their keener awareness of responsibility to others. Here, in alphabetical order, they speak volumes about the best of the next generation.

**Krista Devor** (Lukas Nursery and Butterfly Encounter—Oviedo, Florida): Krista's vocational goal wasn't horticulture, but while a cashier at Lukas Nursery, she appreciated what the industry offered and committed herself to learn more. With support from her boss Caleb Lukas, she earned her FCHP (Florida Certified Horticultural Professional) certification, along with her college degree. She exemplifies that employee who'll commit their time and energy to learning all they

can so they can support others.

Krista said, "I definitely found a passion helping people looking for a backyard oasis. We've transformed some customers' lives by guiding them into building backyards that bring instant peace when visited."

She's implemented this support of others by dramatically increasing the information on signs and tags, ensuring the customer knows what to expect and how to be successful.

**Brandon Kirby** (Rainbow Gardens, San Antonio, Texas): Rainbow Gardens pays good wages, along with 100% of employees' health insurance. Other good benefits include annual performance bonuses.

Brandon said, "I imagine my role here as somebody who dreams big and gets people excited to dream with me." Brandon asks if his staff can pass the "bus test." He defines the bus test as how the organization survives and thrives if the leadership is suddenly hit by a bus.

"We owe it to our team, our suppliers and customers to build an organization that continues. Where is our benefit and loyalty to these people if we're only as good as one leader? Building a team that can survive is an organization's true legacy."

Brandon is seeing higher customer reviews and increasing employee satisfaction.

“It’s critical to build the team that doesn’t revolve around one individual, but to serve our community into the future. It requires all of us to stretch, grow and do uncomfortable—but necessary—things we haven’t done before.”

**Haley Martin** (B.B. Barns, Arden, North Carolina): Haley frequently uses the word “collaboration.” She and her buying team wanted to be better customers—not buyers, customers. They jointly read and discussed “A Quick Guide to Supplier Relationship Management in the Supply Chain” by Stuart Emmett.

Haley lives near where Hurricane Helene disastrously flooded Asheville, North Carolina, in September, 2024. Her home area was isolated and suffered utility outages. While they’d preloaded their pantry in preparation for the hurricane, they forgot cat food. They put a sign saying “Need Cat Food” by their mail box. Within hours, neighbors and strangers brought it to them.

Haley reported, “Everyone felt this call to action was for everyone. The nursery had a sign, ‘FREE Non-potable Water.’ Aid groups handed out bottled drinking water, but you need more than that to clean, wash and have functioning toilets while the infrastructure is being repaired. Customers came to walk around the nursery to mentally escape the situation. We gave away free mums with a sign, ‘We know plants can’t fix everything, but they sure can help!’

“Sometimes you’re the one who needs something; sometimes you can give, but more often, both happen simultaneously, speaking to the importance of a strong community,” she said.

These three simple examples of thinking beyond themselves are on target to start resolving the issues we’re facing as a business, country and world. These Young Retailer Finalists have superb technical competence, but also demonstrate an understanding of responsibility to the greater good. Let’s hope the older generations are listening and emulating these younger leaders. **GP**

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**Come meet the 2025 The Garden Center Group/*Green Profit* Young Retailer Award finalists and see the future of our industry at 8:00 p.m., Monday, July 14, at Cultivate’s Unplugged in Columbus, Ohio.**