



*As you make your way in the world, remember that Stockbridge alums, as a whole, are a loyal group and I ask you to continue this tradition: Stay in touch with your classmates and come back and visit campus as often you can.*

*-Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy*

## Congratulations, Class of 2017!!

*On a Saturday in May, Stockbridge School of Agriculture students donned their caps and gowns to graduate. Pictured are AS grads.*

At the 95th commencement for the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, speakers told the 47 graduates they will become stewards of the world through their chosen professions, leaders in the sustainability movement and the latest proud addition to a long-standing family of graduates who support each other.

The students in six majors received associate of science degrees in Bowker Auditorium today. Degrees were awarded to 13 graduates in arboriculture and community forest management, 12 in equine management, five in sustainable food and farming, three in sustainable horticulture, nine in landscape contracting and five in turfgrass management.

Wesley R. Autio, director of the Stockbridge School, presided at the ceremony along with UMass Amherst Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy and Steve Goodwin, dean of the College of Natural Sciences. In his remarks to the graduates, Goodwin said they are going out into a world where there is a critical need for professionals to create and maintain sustainable farms, sustainable foods and a sustainable landscape. He also urged the graduates to take a moment amid their celebrations to thank their parents, friends and others who supported them in

reaching their goals.

Subbaswamy told the graduates, 'Through your commitment, you have prepared yourselves to meet the new needs of agriculture as they emerge in the years ahead. And in doing so, you have contributed to the historic success of Stockbridge and the entire university. Now, you ready to head off into the world. I know you will be busy. The role of agriculturally related disciplines is every bit as critical today as it was at the inception of the university in 1863.'

He added, 'You connect us to our past and you ensure our future. So, as you make your way in the world, remember that Stockbridge alums, as a whole, are a loyal group and I ask you to continue this tradition: Stay in touch with your classmates and come back and visit campus as often you can.'

Both Goodwin and Subbaswamy noted that UMass Amherst is in the forefront of the green movement and is one of the nation's leading universities in green energy technology and environmentally friendly policies. The Stockbridge School, they told the graduates, plays a key role in maintaining those accomplishments.

## A Note from Our Director

What a year it's been!

We hope your season is starting off nicely, that you're staying cool and growing beautiful things! I'm happy to call attention to new faculty, retirements, events, and student achievements in this edition of our newsletter. We had roughly 135 students graduate this May between the AS and BS programs. In terms of enrollment, we currently see a 15% increase in the AS programs for Fall 2017 and we are awaiting figures for the BS programs.

This spring brought two retirements, one new faculty member, and one ongoing faculty search. Dr. George Howe has retired after 49 dedicated years in education. He is joined by Dr. Pat Vittum. We welcome Renee Ciulla to the faculty, and are currently searching for Dr. Vittum's replacement.

We held the second annual spring Alumni gathering at The Gardens at Elm Bank in March. The event was a success, bringing together nearly 100 graduates of our programs. The next event will be a tailgating event at UMass Homecoming, taking place before the football game on Saturday, October 21. Details are still developing, so watch your email accounts or our social media pages for more information. We hope to see you there! In the meantime, please enjoy the newsletter and have a great summer.

*Wes Autio, Director*

## Remembering A Special Stockie

Robert Glenn Mercurio died at the age of 23 on Dec. 11, 2013, following a logging accident in Vermont. Rob was originally from Massachusetts, born in Beverly and raised in Lynn. However, he built his life in Vermont, a place he had loved since childhood. Rob brought a smile to everyone who knew him. A fun loving, free spirit, he was passionate about life and everything he did. He worked at Fresh Tracks Winery where he showcased his experience and expertise from the Stockbridge degree he achieved in 2010. Rob loved his family and many, many friends with the intensity and zest he poured into everything. An unusually hard worker, he also knew how to relax, and loved sports and spending time in the outdoors. He grew his own peppers, and used them to make his own brand of hot sauces, which he had planned to market.

Rob will be missed forever by his family and friends. In 2016, his parents, Lisa and Glenn, created the Rob Mercurio Memorial Scholarship for the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. With their donation, the Stockbridge team will be able to financially assist students who exemplify Rob's love of life, hard work and Stockbridge. Norberto Marrero of Springfield, Massachusetts is the first recipient of Rob's scholarship.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Rob Mercurio Memorial Scholarship, please visit <https://stockbridge.cns.umass.edu/giving>

Once you are there, go to the "click here" link that will take you to the on-line location where you can make a donation to Rob's Scholarship.

Published by the Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

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*Rob Mercurio*

# Korean War Veteran Earns Degree After 66 Years

By Steve Annear, The Boston Globe

After all this time, he's still not entirely sure why he left. Part of George Jamieson thinks that he may have walked away from the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Stockbridge School of Agriculture without finishing his associate's degree because he was an adventurous young soul who made decisions on a whim.

Another part of the 86-year-old Maine resident says he wanted to fulfill his civic duty, and so he ditched school just six credits shy of graduating to join the US Coast Guard, in the midst of the Korean War.

"When you're young and foolish, you don't know a lot of things," said Jamieson, a self-proclaimed trouble-maker, even at his age. "If you do something, you don't know why you did it."

One thing is for sure, however: On Saturday, the octogenarian became the oldest member of the class of 2017, achieving his associate of science degree in sustainable horticulture more than 60 years after he first enrolled at the school.

"I'm excited," he said in a telephone interview. "It takes a hell of a lot to get me excited. I'm getting old. I'm lucky to be here. I'm looking at the grass side instead of the root side."

Jamieson, a Maynard native, graduated from high school in 1948. For a time, he worked odd jobs painting houses and toiling away in a greenhouse in Sudbury, he said.

He eventually began classes at Stockbridge, before dropping out suddenly in 1951, a semester and a few measly credits shy of completion.

At first, he had tried to join the Navy. But when they wouldn't take him, he said, Jamieson entered the US Coast Guard instead, and was stationed for nine months on a lightship off Cape Cod.

After a brief tour that took him overseas to the Philippines, Jamieson returned home to the US. In 1954, he secured a job at Waltham-based Raytheon, where he worked in the company's missile systems division.

He said he was discharged from service on a Friday, and started his

new gig the following Monday, barely skipping a beat but again putting his education aside for the time being.

"I didn't want to go back to school right away. I wanted to make money," he said. "You were looking forward to having a family, and money was important."

Since retiring from Raytheon in the nineties, Jamieson has lived at his home in Maine, with his wife, Virginia. The



George Jamieson

couple, who has two grown children, has been married for 60 years this June, he said.

With some extra time on his hands as a retiree, an idea came to mind last December: Jamieson decided he wanted to finish school.

"At my age I don't have a lot to do, so I was calling around and I wined up calling UMass," he said. "I haven't been up there for years and years and years. Anyways, that's what happened."

After explaining his story to officials from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, and detailing what it was that pulled him away from completing his coursework, the gears started turning.

With the help of Elizabeth Wiernasz,

registrar of the associates of science degree program at the school, the pieces began to fall into place, and Jamieson was given his final six credits, for completing an "independent study."

Wiernasz said Jamieson's interest in horticulture never stopped growing throughout his life, even during the many gap years he took from school. He has always kept his hands in the soil with planting, cultivating, landscaping, and grafting trees, she said.

"Now, in his young age of 86, he has to take an ATV to work in his garden," she said. "But he's still doing it."

Wiernasz, who formed a bond with Jamieson over the last few months as they worked to get him his degree, said she's been inspired by the veteran's life and delighted by his personality.

"I truly have enjoyed getting to know this man, and his energy and interests," she said. "He has such a wonderful sense of humor."

Officials from the school said Jamieson's achievement marks a rare moment, as far as they are aware — after all, it's not every year that they graduate a man in his eighties.

They tipped their collective caps to the veteran for never giving up on his goal of pursuing an education, even after all of this time.

"George Jamieson exemplifies the initiative and work ethic that we see in so many Stockbridge School of Agriculture graduates and alumni," said UMass Amherst spokesman Daniel Fitzgibbons in a statement. "His decision to complete his degree after leaving school 66 years ago to serve his country shows a remarkable drive and we applaud his achievement."

While Jamieson couldn't attend this weekend's graduation ceremony — Wiernasz tried to get him to show up, but he wasn't able — the school mailed him his cap and gown, a special stole worn by veterans, and a coin they give to those who have served their country.

Now all he needs is the hard copy of his certificate, which should arrive in his mailbox in Maine sometime this summer.

"One of these days it's going to show up," Jamieson said, laughing. "I just have to stay alive."

## **Arboriculture & Community Forest Management**

Thomas F. Houston, who taught Arboriculture and Urban Forestry at UMass, died April 24, 2017 after a brief illness. Tom attended Amherst High School, where he graduated in 1962.

After high school, he went on to serve in the US Marine Corps from 1962-1965 where he was made a Corporal. Tom received his associates degree from Stockbridge School of Agriculture in 1967. He then received his Bachelors, Masters, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Tom taught Arboriculture and Urban Forestry at UMass Amherst Stockbridge School for 32 years. He was a Massachusetts Certified Arborist and served as president of the NE Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture in 1994. Tom was the Tree Warden for Shutesbury, MA, for many years. He was also active in the Franklin County Sportsmen's Club where he served as president in 2012. Tom was an avid tennis player and enjoyed both salt and freshwater fishing.

He leaves behind his loving wife of 47 years, Diane, and their two standard poodles, Rowan and Jordan. Donations may be made in Tom's name to Bright Spot Therapy Dogs, PO Box 132, Leeds, MA 01053 or to Jackson Laboratories, 600 Main St, Bar Harbor, ME 04609. Tom's friends held a remembrance on June 10 at 2pm at Memorial Hall, UMass, Amherst. He will be greatly missed.

## **Equine Management**

For the past couple of years, Equine faculty have been exploring possible avenues for creating a four-year Equine degree. Each year, approximately 60 prospective students apply and get admitted to the two-year associate degree program in Equine Management; however, only a small percentage (~25%) chooses to attend UMass. The remaining students have indicated they want to attend a school that offers a formalized BS curriculum in an equine-related field of study.

Thus, driven by student demand, UMass Amherst is excited to announce a new, four-year program of study in Equine Science starting Fall 2018. The equine program will be moving back into the Veterinary & Animal Sciences department and the faculty and staff are excited for this association, including the numerous opportunities and much needed stability it brings to the Hadley Farm Equine Center. Incoming freshmen will enter as Animal Science majors and can choose one of three concentrations: Animal Biotechnology Concentration, Animal Management Concentration, or the new Equine Science Concentration.

As part of this transition, the two-year associate degree program in Equine Management has accepted its last group of entering freshmen for Fall 2017. This group of highly-motivated and talented students will receive the same high-quality curriculum as previous classes, but will also have the opportunity to transfer into the new four-year program on completion of their AS degree. The Equine Management Class of 2019 will mark the ending of an era, but also the start of a bright new future for UMass Equine.

Hadley Farm will still continue to breed Bay State Morgans and elite Hanoverian horses, giving students the opportunity to learn all phases of reproduction and veterinary care, handle all life stages of horses from foals to stallions, and participate in applied research projects and industry events. However, our herd size will be consolidated to help secure a more fiscally-responsible operation. Please contact the Director of Equine Management, Dr. Cassandra Uricchio, at 413-345-0183 or [curicchio@umass.edu](mailto:curicchio@umass.edu) if you would be interested in adopting one of our retiring horses! Thank you for your support of the UMass Equine program; the faculty, staff and horses could not do what we do without our alumni and supporters!

# ut Our Programs

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## Landscape Contracting

Landscape Contracting students have moved into the newest building on campus (and the largest modern wood building in the northeastern United States). Constructed with cross-laminated timber (CLT) and glue-laminated columns, the 87,000-square-foot facility is the most advanced CLT building in the US and saves the equivalent of over 2,300 metric tons of carbon when compared to a traditional energy-intensive steel and concrete building.

“The Design Building reflects the university’s commitment to sustainability and innovation in education,” said Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy. “It is a landmark building that offers an optimal space for team projects and experimentation and serves as an educational tool for students exploring every aspect of architecture, design, planning and construction.”

## Plant and Soil Sciences & Horticultural Sciences

Students majoring in Plant and Soil Sciences and the Horticulture programs are spending their summers interning in arboreta, agricultural businesses, and research laboratories. Locations include the Arnold Arboretum, Tower Hall Arboretum, Monrovia Nursery, Indigo Agriculture, Smith College Arboretum, and many students are working in research laboratories on campus.

## Sustainable Food and Farming

The Sustainable Food and Farming program welcomes Renee Ciulla, who joined the Stockbridge School of Agriculture’s faculty this spring. She teaches more than half a dozen courses on campus and online and oversees the online associates degree program for SFF. Renee has been teaching at the university level since 2009, performing research since 2007, and working in her community dating back to 2003 when she was a grant-writer and volunteer. In her spare time, Renee enjoys trail running, mountaineering, Italian culture, and playing piano.

## Turfgrass Science & Management

We’d like to congratulate Cameron Ventre for being named the recipient of the 2017 Geoffrey and Carol Cornish Fund for Enhanced Learning Opportunities. The Cornish ELO provides Turfgrass students the ability to attend an out-of-state once-in-a-lifetime internship. This summer, Cameron is working at the prestigious and exclusive Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach, California. Cameron graduated this spring from the Turfgrass Management program with an AS, and returns this fall to attain his BS in Turfgrass Science and Management.

# The Ahronian Way

Over forty years ago, Mark Ahronian had an important conversation that set the course for his career and life. The conversation was with his guidance counselor, and it was the first time Mark had revealed his secret: he loves plants! The guidance counselor encouraged Mark to apply to Norfolk County Agricultural High School and, later, Stockbridge. That recommendation opened the door to Mark's future and successful career in the landscaping industry.

Mark grew up the youngest of four in Holliston, Massachusetts, where he and his family live today. He enrolled in Agriculture Business Management at Stockbridge. His freshmen year, Mark served as Treasurer of the Stockbridge Student Senate. Speaking before the 42 student senate, particularly about raising student fees, helped to feed Mark's leadership drive. He would prepare for the twice a month meetings by practicing his speeches in front of a mirror. On weekends and during the summers, Mark worked at Weston Nursery in Hopkinton. Later, he worked for Baker Landscaping. The owner, Chuck Baker, mentored him

by sharing his knowledge about managing businesses and people.

After Mark graduated from Stockbridge, he worked full time as a foreman and designer at Chuck's business and dreamed of one day owning his own. In 1987, he began his own company, but only operated it on Sundays. In 1990, Mark made his dream a reality, and Ahronian Landscaping became his full time effort. He hired his first employee, his wife, Linda, and together they built a knowledgeable, hardworking team that prides itself on making their customers happy people through their beautiful and unique landscapes. Best of all, of the 25 employees on the Ahronian Landscaping team, just about half are graduates of Stockbridge, including their son, David, and Vice President, Jim Stucchi.

Throughout the years, Mark never forgot about his conversation with that guidance counselor.

"More people need to know about Stockbridge," he said, "and more guidance counselors need to be recommending it just like it was recommended to me." Mark works hard to make sure people know about Stockbridge and the many wonderful career opportunities a Stockbridge degree can provide. He volunteers at local high school career fairs to speak about Stockbridge; he mentors and trains high school students through the internship program at his company; and he teaches classes at the Massachusetts Horticulture Society at Elm Bank. "Everything I have learned, I share with others. It's important to me that young people enter our field, and I do my best to bring them along because the work we all do is very important. We make people happy, and happy people makes the world a better place."



Mark Ahronian (right) and his team of all Stockbridge alumni

Do you also hire Stockbridge graduates?  
Do you encourage your employees to apply to Stockbridge to  
enhance their careers?

Email or Call Allie Thorpe, the communications manager and newsletter editor,  
to find out how to have your business featured in the next newsletter.

[abthorpe@umass.edu](mailto:abthorpe@umass.edu) 413-577-3102

# #StockiesAreEverywhere

Once a week, we interview a current Stockbridge student about his or her summer job or internship. Here are three students' responses.

## Cameron Basila Turfgrass Management

Cameron is spending the summer working as a Grounds Crew Intern for the Washington Nationals baseball team. His summer job consists of a series of tasks associated with maintaining the field for the playing season.

“When the team is in town we mainly focus on field setup and maintenance. There is daily repair to clay surfaces such as the pitching mound, home plate, and the bullpen mounds. Nothing too extensive as we pretty much try and keep the field in top playing condition when the team is around. Minor tweaks and adjustments are made. When the team is out of town there is more extensive cultural practices such as aeration, topdressing, deep needle tining, verticutting, and fertilization. More extensive repair to the clay on the infield skin is done and the pitching mounds are all precisely measured to make sure that we comply with Major League Baseball specifications.”

The coolest part so far? Earlier this summer, Cameron met Ryan Bjorn, a Stockie and UMass alum, currently the Director of Grounds and Environmental Management at the Maryland Soccer Plex.



## Megan Saraceno Sustainable Food & Farming

Megan is working this summer as a Field Hand and Market Assistant at Obercreek Farm in Wappingers Falls, New York!

“My days start at 7AM, the crew checks orders for market and wholesale to be harvested. We harvest both in the fields and in four passive solar greenhouses. Then we wash and pack everything away for multiple methods of distribution. The rest of the morning is either filled with transplanting or trellising. A well deserved lunch is usually at about 12:30 or 1PM. After lunch the tasks vary as necessary, but typically include weeding, pruning, or seeding work in our propagation greenhouse.”



## Emily Perry Horticultural Science

Emily is interning this summer at Monrovia Nurseries in Granby, CT! She has worked side by side with craftsmen and coaches, getting an in-depth look at how they get their plants looking so beautiful! From spacing and trimming to paperwork and experiments, she has been able to gain experience in different departments, and she's excited to see what the coming weeks will bring.

“The passion behind their work is so inspiring to see, and gives me hope everyday for the future of the green industry.”





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<http://stockbridge.cns.umass.edu/homecoming-2017>