

THOLOS

VOLUME 27

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

Cultivating Sustainability

FEATURE

Summer in the City

MEET THE TEAM

It Takes a Village To
Prepare the People's Tree



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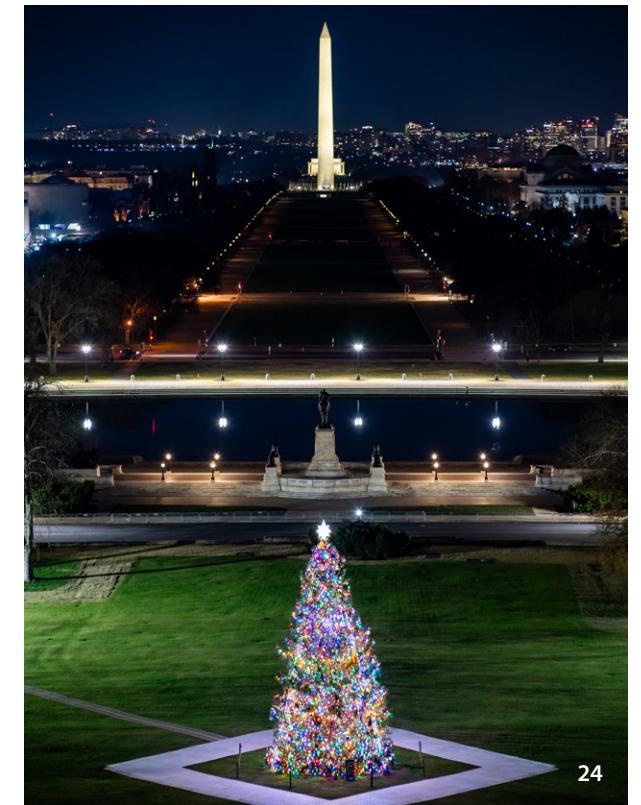
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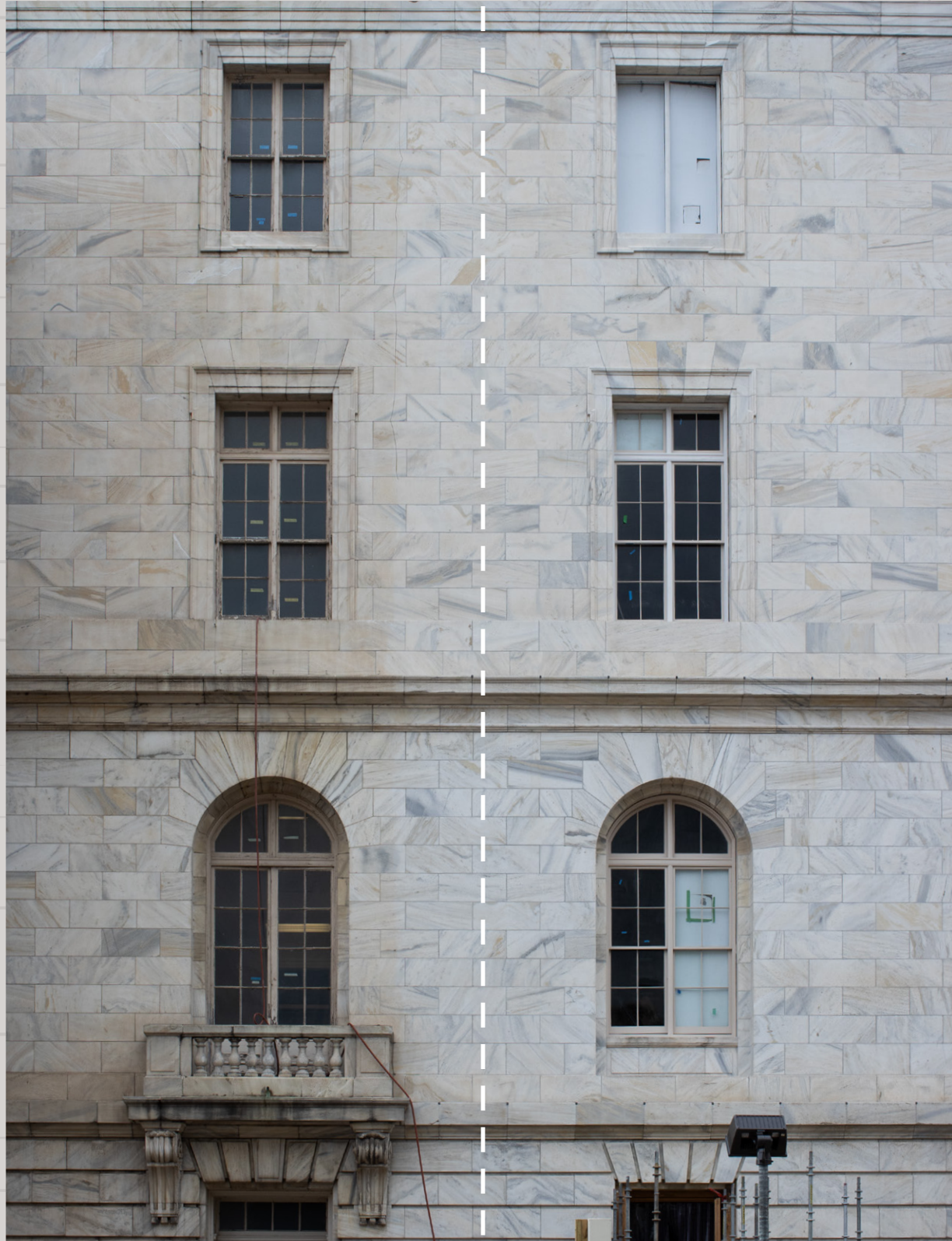
MEET THE TEAM



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BEFORE

AFTER



Cannon Renewal

WRITTEN BY AIMEE JORJANI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN GREENE

Over many years, weathering has diminished the Cannon House Office Building's exterior stone, allowing water to penetrate the building and impairing the building's safety and energy efficiency. As part of the Cannon Renewal project, the exterior envelope — including stone, wood window frames and doors — is being restored to last another 100 years. The project also includes the rehabilitation and stabilization of architectural features including balconies, cornices, balusters and balustrades.



USBG HIGHLIGHT

DEDICATION TO TEAMWORK
AND MISSION LEADS TO

Architect's Citation Award

WRITTEN BY DEVIN DOTSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS HATZENBUHLER AND JAMES ROSENTHAL



Seger mentors new USBG Operations team employees Yin Htwe, left photo, and Nyi U, right photo, on ways to care for the many unique greenhouse and garden systems.

Danny Seger, Maintenance Mechanic Leader at the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG), grew up in Maryland, just outside of D.C. He's always been a helper and a fixer, but he has become a mentor over his 19 years of service at the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), 17 of which have been at the U.S. Botanic Garden. His helpful, positive attitude and hardworking maintenance skills have led him to being selected for the 2023 Architect's Citation Award.

"Danny is a pleasure to work with, and we rely on Danny a lot in so many different ways," said James Adams, USBG Horticulture Manager. "He is always willing to help out, and the best part about it is that he's always got a positive attitude."

USBG Executive Director Susan Pell agrees. "Danny is an outstanding employee who is dedicated to customer service, to excellence in his job as a maintenance mechanic, and to being a supportive teammate and excellent colleague at the garden," said Pell. "I'm so happy for him to be recognized for the great work that he does."

Building and maintaining systems has been a part of Seger's entire life. His father was a carpenter who also worked for the AOC, having joined just after Seger graduated from high school. His father worked in the AOC Construction Division carpentry shop, and when he saw a job opening in a different shop in 2004, he sent it to his son for consideration. Seger applied and

joined the AOC's Construction Division Hazmat team that same year.

For two years, Seger worked the night shift, helping with many renovations throughout the Capitol campus from the Library of Congress Reading Room to the Capitol Power Plant steam tunnels.

"I enjoyed the work and didn't mind the evening hours myself," Seger said. "But by summer 2006, I was looking to get married and we decided I should apply for some other AOC positions that would let me switch to day shift." He was hired as a Maintenance Mechanic Helper at the U.S. Botanic Garden in August 2006, and got married two months later.

"I learned a lot on the job that first year or two," said Seger. "The USBG was just finishing up the installation of the new National Garden, and I shadowed the Operations team, learning how to install signs and help with other finishing tasks."

"I loved my job here at the USBG. I grew up on a farm, so I knew that crop plants were important," Seger said. "It's been interesting to learn about the history and the unique plants in the collection here. Plus, caring for greenhouses, each with different climates, has been very different than working in office buildings."

Danny is an outstanding employee who is dedicated to customer service, to excellence in his job as a maintenance mechanic, and to being a supportive teammate and excellent colleague at the garden.

Susan Pell

USBG Executive Director





Seeger and U.S. Botanic Garden Executive Director Susan Pell after he received the 2023 Architect's Citation Award at the AOC Honor Awards ceremony.

Over time, Seger was able to progress up the ladder in the USBG Operations team. He started doing projects independently, and then began to lead projects.

“By 2018, I got to a point in my career where I was teaching and mentoring new people that joined the Operations team. I was proud to be at a point in my career where I was viewed as a leader and could help others learn,” Seger said. “I knew I needed to set the tone for how I expect this person to be as part of our team.”

Some of Seger’s favorite memories at work include being inside and on top of the 30-foot-tall historic Fountain of Light and Water in Bartholdi Gardens (“I had no clue how many electrical elements and valves are inside that need work and support!”) and meeting many Members of Congress, one First Lady and even seeing the Pope when he visited Congress.

“Probably the most unexpected part of my job has been learning to repair model trains with their very small parts,” Seger said. “The trains are exciting for many visitors to our holiday exhibit — especially kids. I didn’t realize how much customer service would come into my job. Now, if there’s a small kid nearby when a train needs work, I make them my unofficial helper and it makes their day.”

“Danny is an excellent colleague and teammate,” said Libby Rhoads, USBG Chief of Learning and Outreach. “He’s always willing to help when a project needs it, even if it means he needs to learn something new. I’ve seen him in the Conservatory talking with a visitor who’s stopped him while he was walking through, and he’s patient and helps answer visitor questions even when it’s not about his own work.”

Seger was surprised to learn he was selected to receive the Architect’s Citation Award. “I asked the person that called me if they were sure they were calling the right person and if they had the right person,” Seger said with a laugh. “I hope I can live up to the expectations of what others think of me. It’s very humbling.”

“I believe Danny loves his job,” said Operations teammate maintenance mechanic Nyi U. “He is a good mentor and a good teacher. He’s a great guy for the Botanic Garden and the AOC.”

“It’s an honor to be recognized by my colleagues and be told that my work is valued as much as other important jobs throughout the AOC,” Seger said.

Congratulations to Danny Seger, recipient of the 2023 Architect’s Citation Award, and to all AOC Honor Award recipients.



He's always willing to help when a project needs it, even if it means he needs to learn something new. I've seen him in the Conservatory talking with a visitor who's stopped him while he was walking through, and he's patient and helps answer visitor questions even when it's not about his own work.

Libby Rhoads | USBG Chief of Learning and Outreach

red milkweed beetle
(*Tetraopes tetraophthalmus*)
with butterfly weed
(*Asclepias tuberosa*)

These striking red beetles eat milkweed leaves and are commonly found on several milkweed species in the mid-Atlantic region. Primary milkweed pollinators include bees, wasps, and butterflies, but the red milkweed beetle may transfer pollen as it moves between plants.

Visit butterfly weed in the Regional Garden!

Model made with mahogany fruit, Indian redwood fruit, bamboo, coconut, lotus seeds, elm bracts

SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

CULTIVATING SUSTAINABILITY



**Capitol Grounds and Arboretum
Embraces Vintage Electric Cargo
Tricycle for Greener Gardening**

WRITTEN BY PHILIP DAVIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RODNEY NORMAN



▼
Advanced Gardener Philip Davis rides the electric cargo trike to quickly perform daily maintenance tasks, such as morning cleanup and opening the Summerhouse.

“This electric cargo bike symbolizes our commitment to sustainability. It is a testament to our dedication to preserving the natural beauty of these historic grounds while reducing our carbon footprint. We are thrilled with its capabilities.”

Jim Kaufmann
*Director of Capitol
Grounds and Arboretum*

In a picturesque marriage of vintage charm and cutting-edge sustainability, the Capitol Grounds and Arboretum team has unveiled their latest addition to the gardening fleet: a vintage-style electric cargo tricycle. This innovative mode of transportation allows the dedicated gardening staff to move throughout the historic grounds of the U.S. Capitol with ease, all while carrying up to an impressive 300 pounds of gardening tools and horticultural materials.

Drawing inspiration from the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, the Capitol Grounds team made a conscious decision to embrace the environmentally friendly features of electric cargo bicycles. They opted for a three-wheel tricycle design, ensuring enhanced stability and safety in navigating the sprawling grounds. With 20 staff members trained to skillfully operate the tricycle, this new addition is set to transform the way the team tends to their historic grounds and gardens.

Jim Kaufmann, Director of Capitol Grounds and Arboretum, expressed his enthusiasm for the electric cargo tricycle, “This electric cargo bike symbolizes our commitment to sustainability. It is a testament to our dedication to preserving the natural beauty of these historic grounds while reducing our carbon footprint. We are thrilled with its capabilities.”

The advantages offered by the electric cargo tricycle are abundant, providing an array of sustainability benefits that extend beyond the immediate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike traditional vehicles, this electric alternative does not require costly fuel, oil changes or extensive routine maintenance. And without a combustion engine, this electric cargo bike glides gracefully through the grounds, reducing the noise pollution that can interrupt the positive experience of visitors, Members of Congress and others working on the Capitol campus.



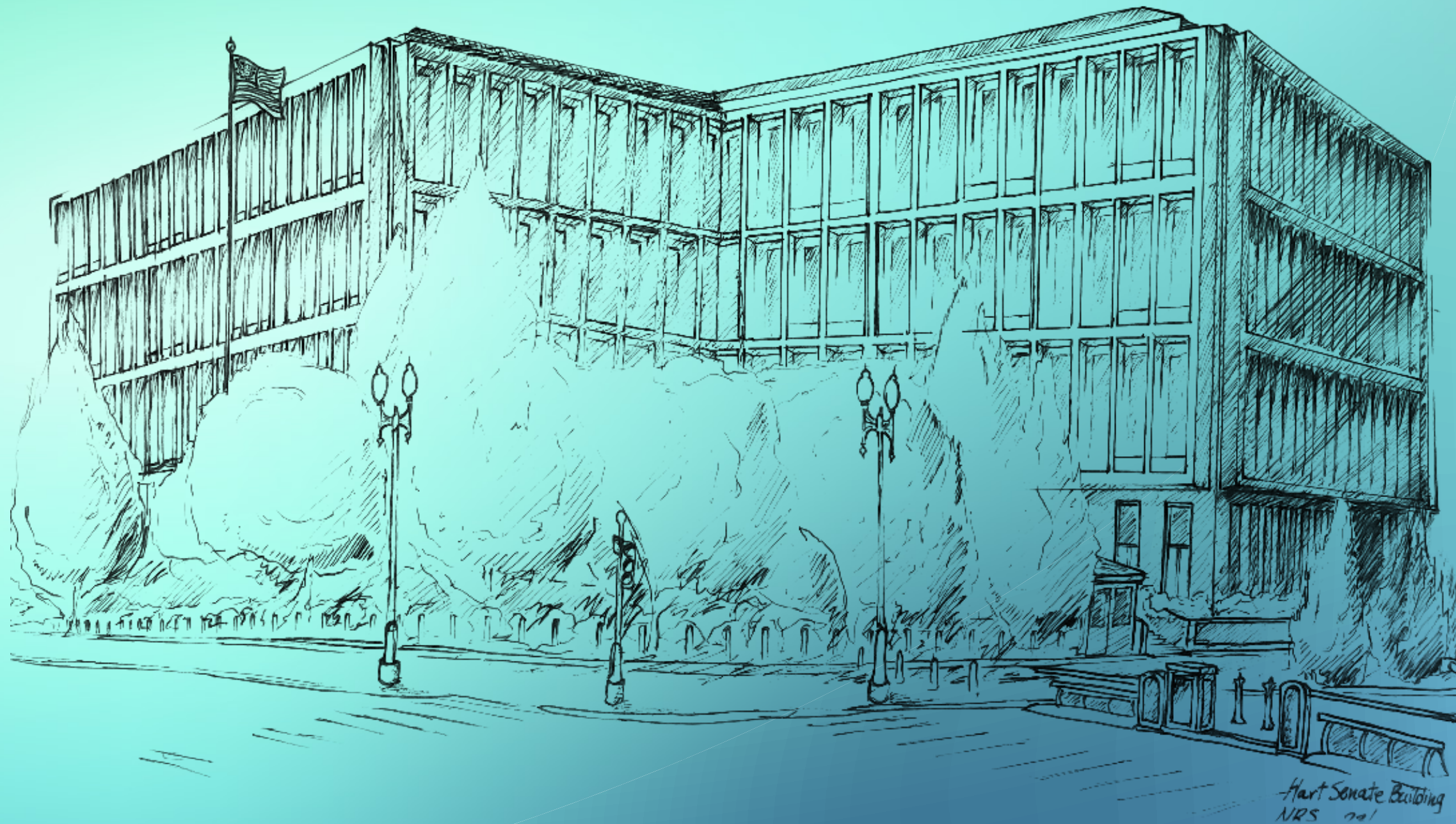
Beyond the environmental benefits, the electric cargo tricycle also saves valuable time. With seamless access to the grounds, logistics become a breeze, allowing the gardening team to focus on their true passion: nurturing the vibrant plants throughout the U.S. Capitol Grounds. The cargo tricycle's ability to haul significant loads of electric gardening tools and horticultural materials empowers

the gardening staff to maintain an awe-inspiring landscape while prioritizing their own well-being through a healthier and more sustainable means of transportation.

As the Capitol Grounds and Arboretum team embraces this innovative approach to sustainable gardening and transportation, they hope to serve as a source of inspiration for

their colleagues as well as other public agencies. By exploring and adopting similar innovative solutions, we can collectively cultivate a greener future for our historic buildings and landscapes. The electric cargo tricycle is just one example of how small sustainable changes can have a significant impact on our environment and community.





FEATURE

SUMMER IN THE CITY

At the AOC, interns gain experience for future seasons of their careers.

WRITTEN BY MADELEINE LUCCHETTI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN GREENE AND AMICHAJ MACIEL
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY NATHANIEL SMITHERMAN

Every summer, dozens of skilled tradespeople and public service aspirants from around the country brave the Washington, D.C., humidity to come and intern for the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). Once they arrive, they're dispatched across the Capitol campus to every jurisdiction, where they take on special projects and assignments with their unique AOC teams. From carpentry and photography to clerking and gardening, the AOC internship program exposes students to a host of opportunities within the federal government. Such an experience often serves as a gateway for interns to discover full-time employment opportunities in the fields of their choice.

Last August, we caught up with six interns and asked them how they spent their summers here.

COMING TO CAMPUS



LOGAN MARTIN

Washington, D.C., is a hot spot for summer internships in public and private organizations alike, and competition for spots is often fierce. Some applicants already had their eyes on the AOC internship program and waited many months for the USAJOBS.gov application to open. Others learned of an opening through mentors, shared connections or even family members. While each application process differed, all accepted interns were notified through email, and their future supervisors and managers helped solidify start dates and other logistics. The typical program length is 12 weeks.

Some interns came from as far as California and Florida. Many were enrolled in local universities like University of Maryland and Towson University. One came from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Each held a varying degree of familiarity with D.C., and all had opportunities to explore the nation's capital further — even through AOC-specific programming like tours and workshops coordinated through the Employee Program Branch. Many interns named the Capitol Dome tour, the Library of Congress

tour and Capitol campus scavenger hunts as highlights.

"I had a lot of favorite parts of the program," said Logan Martin, a Gardener Aide at the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG), "but I think those activities really connected the interns, even though we weren't necessarily working together."

Martin, a Cecil County, Maryland, native and University of Maryland student, spent his summer working outside, mostly in the USBG Regional Garden and raised plant beds. He fell in love with studying native plants during the pandemic.

"There wasn't much to do, so I spent a lot of time exploring the woods near my house," said Martin. "It ignited an interest in learning where and how local plant species originated."

Martin originally enrolled in college as a political science major before switching to studying horticulture. At the AOC, he was able to engage both passions: exploring the historic campus while working with numerous native plant species at the USBG. His capstone project discussed the emergence of a "volunteer plant" in one of the terrace's raised beds. Such plants spring up of their own accord, without being planted by a gardener.

Martin wasn't alone in his ability to translate his personal passions into professional outcomes: it's common for AOC interns to be placed in jurisdictions and offices that correspond with their own interests. And if those interests aren't listed in the job description, interns are often welcome to tailor their projects to include them.

POWERING THE FUTURE



**GWENDOLYN
ZECKOWSKI**

When Gwendolyn Zeckowski came to the Capitol Power Plant as an Engineering Aide, she was excited to help with chemical deliveries and air and water permitting — she'd studied similar processes during her undergraduate years at the University of Maryland as an environmental science major.

"My previous internships were more focused on wildlife preservation, working with birds, things like that," she said. "I mentioned that I was interested in sustainability, and my AOC supervisors were able to connect me with an Environmental Engineer at the Capitol Power

Plant — so I ended up being able to do some sustainability research alongside my normal day-to-day projects."

Zeckowski enjoyed meeting interns across different jurisdictions and spending time on Capitol Hill. As a DMV native, she's no stranger to the D.C. area — and often can be found close by at DC Vault, a pole vault club that practices near Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. This fall, she's applying the summer's learnings in a new capacity as she pursues her master's degree in geographic information systems.

"...I was interested in sustainability, and my AOC supervisors were able to connect me with an Environmental Engineer at the Capitol Power Plant — so I ended up being able to do some sustainability research alongside my normal day-to-day projects."

A SPECIAL PARTNERSHIP



JT WASHINGTON

A select group of interns came to the AOC together from Charleston, South Carolina, where they're enrolled at the American College of the Building Arts (ACBA). They are the first cohort of students to arrive at the AOC through a partnership between the school and the agency, which was initially established in 2020. ACBA describes itself as "the only college in America that fully integrates professional training in the building trades with a liberal arts core curriculum." Students can earn a degree in traditional skills like blacksmithing, architectural carpentry, and classical architecture and design.

JT Washington is one such ACBA student — and his journey to the AOC could be called serendipitous. Originally from California, Washington's senior year of high school was interrupted by the onset

of the pandemic. He wasn't sure what to do after graduating, so he took what he calls the "typical" route and enrolled in a state university — but left after a year and a half.

He learned about ACBA through his father, who'd seen the school mentioned in a PBS special. On a whim, Washington applied as an architectural carpentry student and was accepted. He and his father drove across the country to South Carolina, seeing the school for the first time on move-in day.

"I definitely felt like I could be biting off more than I could chew," Washington laughed. "When I got to ACBA, I'd never even held a two-by-four. But the risk paid off!"

He dove headfirst into his studies and has since worked in wood shops in New York and elsewhere. He heard about the partnership with the AOC through word of mouth and was brought on to assist the cabinetry shop in the Library Buildings and Grounds jurisdiction. Over the summer, he created custom cabinetry, shelving units and a vessel to contain ceremonial dishware. If Washington's approach to his career began a bit like throwing darts, his accomplishments at the AOC show he hit a bullseye.



"When I got to ACBA, I'd never even held a two-by-four. But the risk paid off!"

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM THE HILL



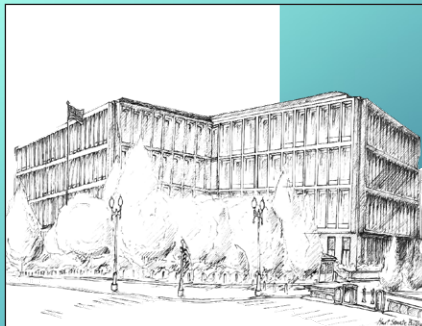
**NATHANIEL
SMITHERMAN**

For one of Washington’s friends, fellow intern Nathaniel Smitherman, working at the AOC has been an opportunity to tap into a lifelong love for classical architecture. Since childhood, Smitherman enjoyed watching home renovation TV shows with his mother and grandmother — both of whom are artists as well. His military family moved around the country quite a bit, and each time

Smitherman would study the floor plan of the new house in detail. ACBA was perhaps a more obvious choice for him, especially since attending would give him a chance to be immersed in the classical architecture found in Charleston.

Smitherman came to the AOC via the ACBA partnership and lived with other interns on Capitol Hill while he served as an Architecture Aide with the Senate Office Buildings jurisdiction. He often went for runs between their shared apartment and Capitol campus buildings, taking time afterwards to sketch what he saw. His AOC supervisor recognized his talent and asked if he could render images of the Senate office buildings, since photographs were some of the only artistic representations of them that existed.

“That was really amazing for me,” Smitherman said. “I had this opportunity to ‘flex’ my art muscles, while still thinking about architecture and doing something lasting in the internship.”



Left: Nathaniel Smitherman’s illustration of the U.S. Capitol Building and surrounding area. Right: Nathaniel Smitherman’s illustration of the Hart Senate Office Building.

AN ONGOING LEGACY



**MARKIYA
GOTHARD**

The AOC's robust intern program has continued to grow in its scope and program offerings. Interns support a diverse range of Capitol campus functions, and some are more behind-the-scenes than others.

Markiya Gothard, who spent the summer as an Office Clerk with the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center (CVC), laughed when asked about her first day at the AOC.

"The CVC is a maze," she said. "It took me a while to find my way down here!"

But find her way, she did: Gothard came to the AOC after seeing the intern opening listed on USAJOBS.gov.

Growing up in Prince George's County, Maryland, she trained intensively in dance and musical theater. Her love for the performing arts inspired her to study visual art at the college level. Now, the Towson University student majors in art history, with a minor in museum studies. Her academic interests pulled her toward the AOC's mission — and the internship program, she thought, could help her decide where in the field she might pursue a career.

"Before coming here, I definitely thought I'd take a more curatorial route in the art world," Gothard said. "Now, I'm realizing that I also enjoy the operations side of things."

Throughout the summer, Gothard assisted the CVC Gift Shop team in conducting market research and identifying vendors whose products can be sold in the U.S. Capitol. It can be difficult to find the perfect goods, since everything sold within the CVC Gift Shop must be made in the United States, and many need to have an educational component.

"If you've ever wondered why the CVC Gift Shop doesn't have snow globes," Gothard joked, "it's because it's so hard to find ones that are made in the United States!"

Gothard's largest project was her summer research paper, which drew the distinctions and similarities between historical and cultural institutions.

"Before coming here, I definitely thought I'd take a more curatorial route in the art world... Now, I'm realizing that I also enjoy the operations side of things."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE



MASON LAMB

Another AOC intern would likely be interested in Gothard's research: Mason Lamb, an ACBA student and Architecture Aide in the House Office Buildings jurisdiction, has a special place in his heart for historic preservation. He rarely leaves home without a drawing instrument and spent many evenings and weekends in local D.C. museums, historic towns like Harper's Ferry or hiking spots in Northern Virginia. He often can be found copying designs from architects known as the "great masters," and enjoyed coming into work at his team's office in the Rayburn House Office Building, which features a blend of classically styled and modern architectural elements.

"I have to say, though," Lamb remarked. "I think the most beautiful structure on campus is the Library of Congress' Thomas Jefferson Building!"

A native North Carolinian, he named meeting one of his home state's senators as a highlight of the summer. He also had the chance to work on several long-standing projects, including renovating old telephone closets that are now being used for staff taking video calls, and creating fact sheets for each House office building. Participation in these efforts came as a pleasant surprise.

"Before I started here, I figured I'd spend most of my time fetching coffee and running errands," Lamb said. "The work I've gotten to do makes me really want to come back to the AOC — hopefully after graduation!"

Though summer has passed, we're still looking forward to the next class of AOC interns, who bring a fresh and industrious spirit to the AOC mission. As we begin to plan for future programs, we hope to see our 2023 interns back on the Capitol campus one day.



"Before I started here, I figured I'd spend most of my time fetching coffee and running errands... The work I've gotten to do makes me really want to come back to the AOC — hopefully after graduation!"



MEET THE TEAM

It Takes a Village To Prepare the

PEOPLE'S TREE

WRITTEN BY CAROL CAMPOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN GREENE,
THOMAS HATZENBUHLER AND RODNEY NORMAN

▼
Arborist, Matthew
Rawson decorating
the U.S. Capitol
Christmas Tree.



For many people around the country, the start of the holiday season is marked by selecting and decorating a Christmas tree. Likewise, the holidays start on Capitol Hill when the Christmas tree arrives on the Capitol campus. A team of employees from the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) work seamlessly and tirelessly to ensure that the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree is ready to spread holiday cheer to visitors from all over the country and around the world.

For many families, it is an annual tradition to come to the U.S. Capitol to see and take photos with the Christmas tree. Those memories and photos are made possible by the collaboration and hard work of employees from various AOC jurisdictions. The Capitol Grounds and Arboretum team selects the tree from a national forest designated by the U.S. Forest Service and a team of arborists work to install and decorate the tree on the West Front Lawn. The Capitol Power Plant Distribution High Voltage and Electronics Branch teams work to ensure that electrical needs for the tree arrival and lighting ceremonies are

met. The Capitol Building team works diligently to prepare the areas around the West Front Lawn for the tree arrival and lighting ceremonies, ensuring that no matter the weather the events are successful. The Photography and Technical Imaging Branch works for months documenting the work by the various jurisdictions, including the selection, arrival and tree setup, as well as the lighting ceremony and the recycling of the wood from the Christmas tree after the end of the holiday season. Lastly, the Office of the Chief Security Officer with the U.S. Capitol Police ensure that the tree arrives on campus safely and oversee security details for the tree arrival and lighting ceremonies.

This multijurisdictional team effort involves dozens of hard-working, dedicated AOC employees who are proud of their work and conscious of their role in making this special tradition successful and joyous for all. We invite you to meet a few of them and learn more about what it takes to bring holiday cheer from a national forest to Capitol Hill.

🌲 CAPITOL GROUNDS AND ARBORETUM 🌲

The Capitol Grounds and Arboretum team works closely with the U.S. Forest Service to select the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. Once the tree is selected, a team of arborists work diligently preparing for the arrival ceremony, then setting up and decorating the tree for the lighting ceremony.



Capitol Grounds and Arboretum team, from left to right: William "Harper" Scott Martin, Preston Carter, Matthew Arnold, Henry Brady, Thomas Hatzenbuhler (Photography and Technical Imaging Branch), Matthew Rawson and Steven Graham

Jim Kaufmann

DIRECTOR, CAPITOL GROUNDS AND ARBORETUM



Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU AND YOUR TEAM SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: The large part of Capitol Grounds and Arboretum's work revolves around installation, decorating, lighting and removal. We go to great efforts to protect the grounds of the U.S. Capitol and work very strategically with many other partners to safely load in ground protection required for the crane. A large group effort is required to safely rig the tree, offload from the truck, install and secure the tree in place. We do this in one day generally always under the watchful eye of many press cameras. Then the team goes to work on ensuring the tree structure is full and presentable. Then comes the installation of the thousands of ornaments and lights and the star topper. We complete the process with installation of pedestrian ground protection to provide a safe and accessible path and walking platform around the tree. It makes for a real treat to be able to say that you decorated the Capitol Christmas Tree. Our arborists are the main portion of the workforce that works on it. That is a team of eight when fully staffed. The offloading of the tree may require up to 30 employees including gardeners, equipment operators, laborers, masons and plumbers.

Q: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FIND IN SELECTING THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS TREE? HOW MANY TREES HAVE YOU SELECTED IN YOUR TENURE AT THE AOC?

A: Numerous challenges are present in selecting the tree. The biggest considerations are finding the balance between the most aesthetically pleasing tree versus logistics of harvesting and any potential environmental impacts. For example, a full and visually perfect tree may be available, but it could be in a remote area that will not accommodate an 83-foot tractor trailer and cranes required for harvesting.

The 2023 Christmas tree will officially be my sixth U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. I had the pleasure of assisting the previous director in 2017. I have also selected Christmas trees in the past for the U.S. Botanic Garden and the National Gallery of Art. It is always great to meet new people and understand why the Christmas tree is important to them and the community. I can get a sense about how the tree can impact a community and forest region. The tree plays a role in many people's lives and I get to be one tiny part of that experience.



Steve Graham

ARBORIST SUPERVISOR, CAPITOL GROUNDS AND ARBORETUM

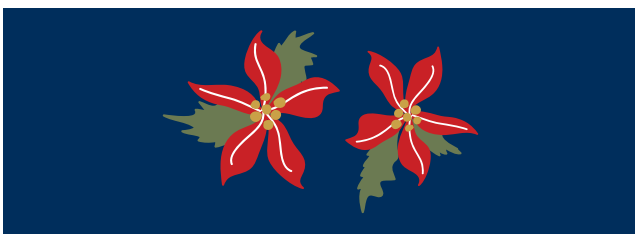
Q: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU AND YOUR TEAM FACE WHEN SETTING UP OR DECORATING THE TREE?

A: Weather is a huge factor for setting up trees. Too much wind could potentially cause a delay or cancellation, and rain or wintry weather is something we just have to work with. Another challenge is the short amount of time to complete the tree setup and decoration. With roughly a week to get this project finished, often we must work through inclement weather, holidays and weekends. This is often tough when so many people prefer to travel with family over the Thanksgiving holiday. A big challenge for the arborist team is receiving a tree that may have had many limbs cut or pruned, broken or damaged due to its size and challenge of fitting onto a flat bed. While decorating the tree we must be very selective regarding what decorations will adorn the tree. Items such as paper products, poorly crafted ornaments and certain size variations can play a big role in what is to be hung on the tree. While supporting the tree lighting ceremony we do multiple test lightings. We set up a perimeter around the tree, do a final cleanup, provide the appropriate signage and tree information for attendees and make sure our final product is ready for the world to view. Many times, we must add security fencing for the night of the lighting.



Q: WHAT DOES THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE MEAN TO YOU?

A: Working on my 14th Christmas tree this year still brings me much joy and pride. My family and children often get to enjoy the efforts our AOC and Capitol Grounds and Arboretum teams put forth to bring some Christmas spirit to all who celebrate. Personally, I really enjoy the collaboration, professionalism and meeting all the kind people behind the scenes to make this a successful holiday tradition on Capitol Grounds. Also, getting the children involved makes this more special and worthwhile. Sadly, the last entire family photo I have with my late father was taken at the Christmas tree in 2020. I like to think of how proud he was of me and my team on a job well done at our nation's capital.





CAPITOL POWER PLANT



The Capitol Power Plant Distribution High Voltage team is in charge of setting up and wiring the tree to make sure that the Christmas lights turn on when the Speaker of the House and the designated youth tree lighter flip the switch at the end of the Christmas tree lighting ceremony. The Electronics Branch supports the lighting ceremony by providing sound support for the event.



Capitol Power Plant team, from left to right: Christopher Potter, Ahmon Thomas, Bryan Leonard, Youssef Mohammad-Zadeh, Berry Russom, Deidra Carter and Todd Murphy

Berry Russom

HIGH VOLTAGE ELECTRICIAN LEADER , CAPITOL POWER PLANT



Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU AND YOUR TEAM SUPPORT THE TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: Safety is the first thing. After the tree is mounted, we start by putting up the lights. Depending on the size of the tree, we use around four to five thousand new LED lights that will draw about 40 to 50 amps (4,000 to 6,000 watts), this is equivalent to the energy that a clothes dryer uses at home. As for the ceremony, our team provides all electrical needs such as power for the Speaker's podium and all the media covering the event. And of course, the main power for the tree itself. Weather is one of the main challenges for our team. Sometimes rain, sleet, wind and snow can make our job harder, but our team gets the job done and the ceremony does go on regardless of the weather.

Q: WHAT DOES THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE MEAN TO YOU?

A: The Capitol Christmas Tree means to me togetherness; it always brings out the good in all of us. For one moment in time, it gives everyone something we all can relate to, and it helps us experience happiness and love for all. It is also special to see all the children from the state the tree is from. It really makes you feel great to see the happiness that our hard work brings to their faces. The Christmas tree symbolizes all of us coming together for the common good and I can't say how good it makes me feel to see all the children, the smiles, the happy faces and the glow of the lights on their shining faces.

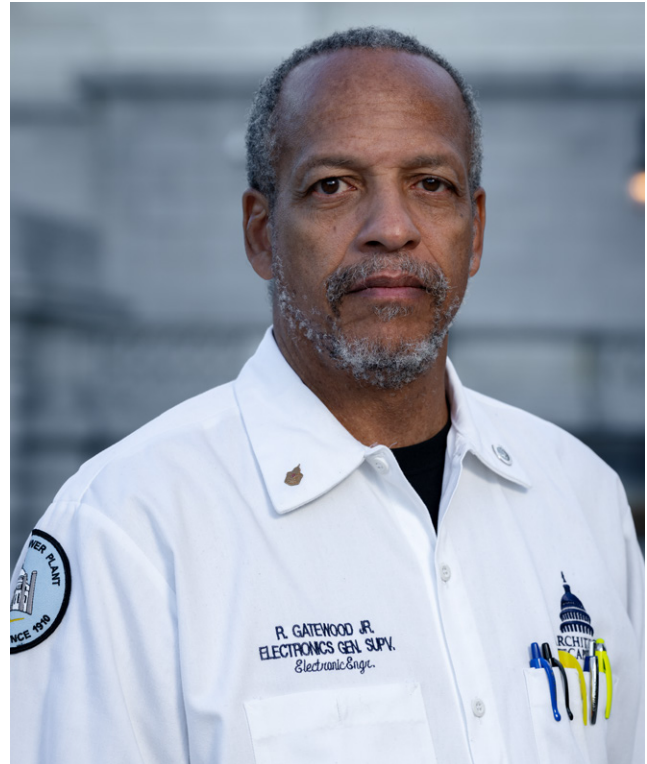


Robert Gatewood

ELECTRONICS MECHANIC GENERAL SUPERVISOR, CAPITOL POWER PLANT

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU AND YOUR TEAM SUPPORT THE TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: Annually the Electronics Branch (EB) team is tasked to support the delivery and lighting ceremonies for the Capitol Christmas Tree. The arrival ceremony is a smaller event, so the EB team uses a mid-level audio system to deliver the sound. The Christmas tree lighting ceremony is a much larger event that involves Members of Congress, several federal agencies and the public. For that event, we work with an audio contractor to provide a public address system and system technical engineer. A concert-level system is used to deliver the sound and includes podium microphones, mixers and an audio power amplifier to supply the speakers. Additionally, an auxiliary feed is provided for press and congressional recording studios to also receive the audio. Our team is comprised of three branches; procurement and planning, delivery ceremony and lighting ceremony, and eight electronics mechanics and engineers work on the Christmas tree events.



Q: WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF WORKING ON THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE PROJECT?

A: The inner agency togetherness that just happens . . . all to ensure the public display is spectacular and favorably memorable. For each year it is the pleasure of being part of history, though it is behind the scenes, I feel privileged to have that experience to share with my friends and family during story times.

▼
The Capitol
Christmas Tree
Star is made
by the AOC
Upholstery Shop
and measures
4'1/2" wide by
5'1/2" tall.





CAPITOL BUILDING



The Capitol Building team supports the arrival and tree lighting ceremonies — ensuring that planning is in place, so necessary equipment is set up correctly, in working order and on time so both the Christmas tree's arrival and lighting ceremonies take place without a hitch.



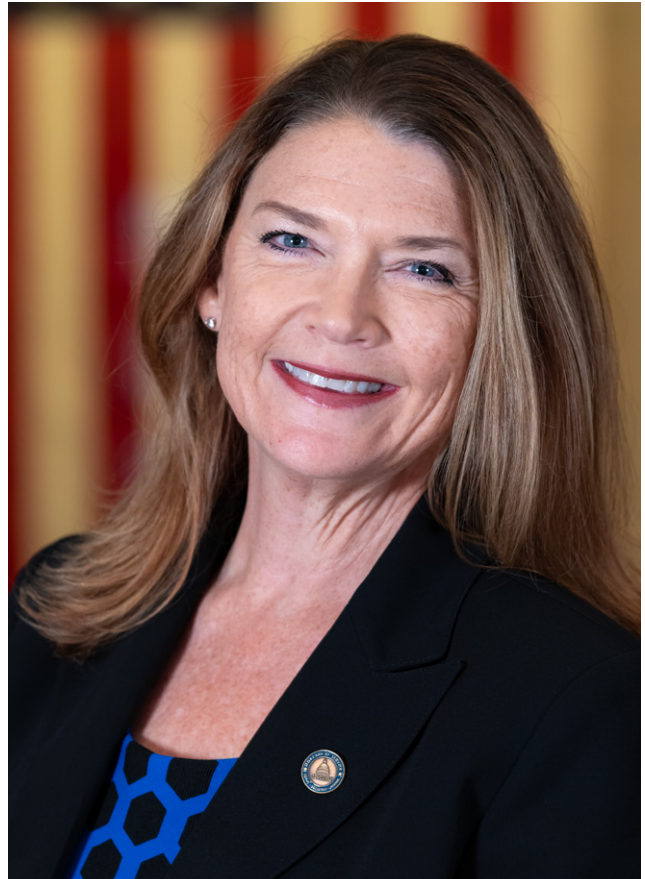
Capitol Building team, from left to right: Robert Thomas, George Turner, Jacob Grace, Carlos Gregg, Calvin Delilly, Jose Acosta, Willie Myers, Michael Derr and Kevin Brown

Kimberly Coats

BUSINESS FINANCIAL ANALYST, CAPITOL BUILDING

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU AND YOUR TEAM SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: The Planning, Evaluation and Operation (PEO) team works with Legislative and Public Affairs, Capitol Grounds and Arboretum, and the Speaker's office to plan and execute the setup for the tree lighting ceremony. The majority of Capitol Building employees play some role in the event including PEO working on planning and setup logistics; Labor to stage and set up equipment; Carpentry to provide leveling of the podium after placement and fabrication of height boxes (for the young participants); Paint to touch up the outdoor podium; Masons providing the ADA mats; and Sheet Metal providing crossovers and ramps to access the lawn. Obviously, the ceremony is outdoors and therefore subject to weather! We've held ceremonies in warm and cold weather, sometimes snow and unfortunately sometimes (like 2016), in the pouring rain!



Q: WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF WORKING ON THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE PROJECT?

A: Like all AOC events, large or small, the best part is partnering with great coworkers from all jurisdictions who work together to ensure the ceremony is a success and the AOC is represented in the best light. Typically, a student from the state where the tree is from is selected to help "flip the switch." It's always special to see the excitement on their face as they countdown to light the tree!

Ricardo Mitchell

MATERIALS HANDLER SUPERVISOR, CAPITOL BUILDING



Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOUR TEAM SUPPORTS THE TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: We provide labor support for the Christmas tree arrival and lighting ceremonies. We set up the stanchions, install mats, arrange the chair sets and podium with the light switch to light the tree. Our team works regardless of weather, and we have to have enough manpower to move the equipment through the sidewalks to the location of the Christmas tree. Usually, 10 to 12 members of our team work on this project to get it done in a timely manner.

Q: WHAT DOES THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE MEAN TO YOU?

A: Working on the Christmas tree brings back memories of when my father used to bring us to see the Capitol Christmas Tree when I was a kid. It is special to know that other kids will remember this event and one day bring their own kids here to appreciate and take pictures with the tree. It is also special to know that this Christmas tree is seen all around the world and on TV throughout the holiday season and that me and my team play a part in making it happen.





PHOTOGRAPHY AND TECHNICAL IMAGING BRANCH



The Photography and Technical Imaging Branch (PTIB) team works on documenting and capturing the tree selection, harvest, arrival and lighting ceremonies. They also document the work done by all jurisdictions to prepare for the tree lighting ceremony. This talented team of photographers works day and night to ensure that hundreds of images from these events are taken and archived for future generations.



A view of the Capitol Christmas Tree illuminated before dawn.

Thomas Hatzenbuhler

PHOTOGRAPHER, PHOTOGRAPHY AND TECHNICAL IMAGING BRANCH

Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOU AND YOUR TEAM SUPPORT THE TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: PTIB supports the annual tradition of the Capitol Christmas Tree by providing photography and videography documentation of the numerous teams, individuals and events that ensure the tree is a special and memorable experience for Members of Congress, AOC staff and the public. This year, we had the opportunity to tell the entire story of the Capitol Christmas Tree through photos and video. I traveled with Jim Kaufmann, Director of Capitol Grounds and Arboretum, to the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia to document the selection process, as well as the harvesting of the tree. PTIB also photographs and films the arrival of the tree to the West Front of the U.S. Capitol Building, which is a well-coordinated day of activity involving many AOC employees across jurisdictions coming together to ensure the tree arrives safely and is anchored securely to the lawn of the West Front. Throughout the weeks following the arrival of the tree, the PTIB team will photograph AOC arborists and the High Voltage crew as they decorate the tree and install the innumerable strands of lights that will eventually illuminate the tree and the West Front of the U.S. Capitol Building. The PTIB team also photographs the AOC's efforts in setting up for the tree lighting ceremony, as well as the ceremony itself, as the crowning achievement of the AOC's hard work and dedication to this time-honored tradition.



Q: CAN YOU SHARE A SPECIAL ANECDOTE OR MEMORY FROM YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE?

A: This year, I was given the opportunity to travel to the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia to document the selection process and harvesting of the tree. This is the very first time that our office has told the entire story of the Capitol Christmas Tree from the selection of the tree to the lighting ceremony on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol. I had never been to West Virginia prior to my journey there in July 2023, and the landscapes of the Monongahela National Forest are incomparably beautiful. I am very grateful for the experiences I had photographing and filming in such an amazing place! The entire experience of the Capitol Christmas Tree is all about the people that make it happen. For me, the work that goes into documenting every aspect of this tradition is a celebration of the dedicated employees of the AOC (and National Forest Service, U.S. Capitol Police, etc.) that come together to accomplish great achievements. My role and responsibility is to highlight those individuals and teams in the best light possible. Pun intended.

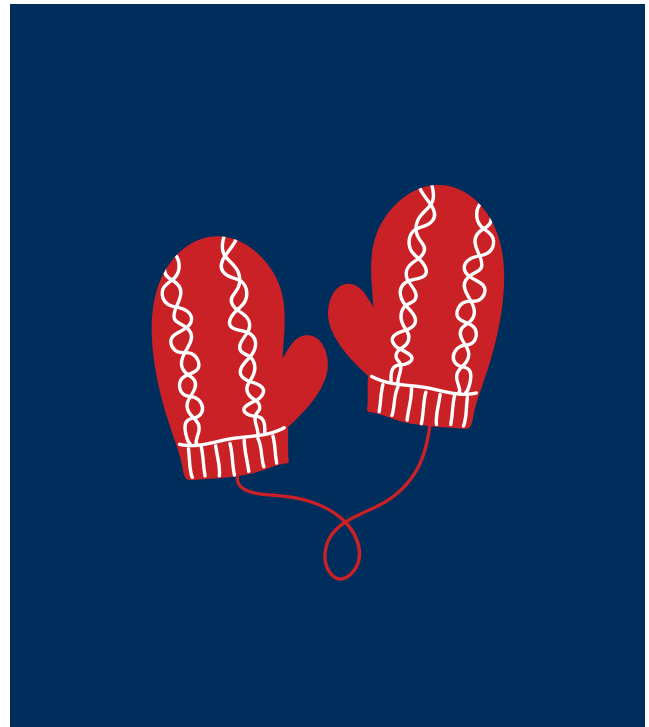


Sean Greene

PHOTOGRAPHER, PHOTOGRAPHY AND TECHNICAL IMAGING BRANCH

Q: DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE IMAGE THAT YOU THINK CAPTURES THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT THAT THE TREE BRINGS TO THE CAPITOL CAMPUS?

A: My favorite image is from Thomas, who managed to get on a lift with one of our AOC employees and took amazing photographs of the star being placed on top of the tree. I just feel like it captures a really unique time and place and feeling as well as showing behind-the-scenes some of the work that goes into doing all of these great things. I'm honored to be a part of documenting the hard work that goes on at the AOC. It is an inspiringly beautiful place that is ever showing me new sides to its face. Preserving the heritage of the art, grounds and buildings is a monumental task and the people that work behind the scenes doing it are some of the best of us.



Q: CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW YOUR TEAM SUPPORTS THE TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY?

A: Every year we join the High Voltage team before the official tree lighting ceremony to do a prelight of the tree in order to create the best image of the Capitol Christmas Tree. We wake up before the roosters to capture the perfect balance between early morning first light and the twinkling of the tree seated in front of the Capitol at just the right position. We do quite a bit of technical photography on this usually using a perspective correction lens of an ideal length to showcase the tree, not only lit in a way that perfectly matches the sky but also from a perspective that retains the Capitol Building's architecture and scale. We definitely nerd out. The goal being to create a stunning keepsake.



Legislative and Public Affairs
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

THOLOS VOLUME 27

The Architect of the Capitol strives to meet its mission 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to **serve** Congress and the Supreme Court, **preserve** America's Capitol, and **inspire** memorable experiences for all who visit the buildings and grounds.

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