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Table of Contents

Academies of Loudoun.....	Page 1
Remembrance.....	Page 2
WVU Conservation Biology Class...	Page 2
Fidelis Corporation Update.....	Page 2
WAJR Radio in Morgantown.....	Page 3
Dunstan Hybrid.....	Page 4
Fort New Salem.....	Page 4
Getting Ready to Pot.....	Page 5
Volunteer Award Winners.....	Page 5
Quarterly Meetings.....	Page 6
WV Chapter Summer Intern Flyer....	Page 7
Cassie Stark's New Role in TACF....	Page 8
TACF's Annual Seed Sale.....	Page 8

Academies of Loudoun

The Academies of Loudoun is a magnet school in Leesburg, Virginia. It is part of Loudoun County Public Schools, and houses three schools with a focus on STEM education: The Academy of Engineering and Technology; The Academy of Science; and the Monroe Advanced Technical Academy. Conceptualized over a decade ago, the Academies of Loudoun is the first specialized STEM facility of its kind, located in Loudoun County, Virginia. The foundation of their instructional practice is designing authentic, challenging learning experiences for Deeper Learning. At the Academies of Loudoun, the students continuously seek out ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice. They are eager to make meaningful contributions to the world in all STEM fields, and often do so through Experiential Learning.

WV chapter members, **Bernie and Linda Coyle**, gave three American chestnut seedlings and 25 nuts to Martinsburg resident, **Eric Goff** who is a Chemical and Laboratory Safety Specialist at the Academies of Loudoun. The school has a greenhouse where Eric can store his seedlings prior to planting. Eric will have to find a suitable site to plant the trees as there are many areas of limestone in the WV eastern panhandle, soil that is not suitable for chestnut.



Eric Goff with two chestnut seedlings

Soil pH is very important when growing chestnut trees. In 2013, the WV

chapter planted 60 chestnut trees at the Jennings Randolph Lake in Mineral County. It turned out that the trees were planted in alkaline soil, and none of them survived. While most of WV contains acidic soils, there are areas where this is not the case.

Remembrance

The WV chapter receives a number of email each week. Many of them are asking for advice on how to distinguish American and Chinese chestnuts. Others request trees or how to plant nuts. One recent email from a non-member, **Rod Cook**, provided directions to a large, nut-bearing chestnut in Corinne, WV in Wyoming County, south of the town of Mullens. Mr. Cook provided the following remembrance:

"This makes me think of when I was 9 or 10 years old. I lived on a farm with my grandparents, exactly like the book, *The Yearling*. My Pop would go out and cut the giant dead chestnuts down with his double-bit ax. Then we would cut them up with the crosscut saw and pull them back to the woodlot with the mule".

If any WV chapter members have similar stories, we would love to hear them.

Mr. Cook originally wrote to inform the WV of a large American chestnut tree near his home in Corinne. Long-time WV chapter member, **Don Dodd** from Raleigh County has agreed to take a look at the tree to determine if the tree is an American chestnut. Many thanks to Don for making the effort. It takes the entire chapter to assist with these state-wide requests.

WVU Conservation Biology Class

Dr. Kevin Barry of the Eberly College' Biology department has asked Mark Double to speak to his conservation biology class for the last several years. The story of the American chestnut dovetails perfectly into the area of conservation as TACF has spent the last 40+ years working on restoration of this iconic tree.

The students are provided a 2-hour lecture followed by a field trip to the WVU Agronomy Farm in Morgantown, home to 900 chestnut trees. The lecture covers the history of American chestnut and its uses. The introduction of the chestnut blight fungus follows along with efforts toward restoration.



Professor Kevin Barry's conservation biology class in a chestnut orchard at WVU's Agronomy Farm.

At the Agronomy Farm, the students are able to see American, Chinese and European chestnut trees along with backcross trees. Leaves of all three species are evident so the students can see the shiny, hairy Chinese leaves, versus the dull, hairless American leaves. Twigs are also a good feature to distinguish the two species. American twigs are reddish with pointed buds, while Chinese chestnut twigs are tan/brown with rounded buds. Chinese twigs are hairy while American twigs are not. The chestnut orchards at the Agronomy Farm (there are 6 blocks of 150 trees each) are a wonderful living laboratory. It is not everywhere where several chestnut species are planted in the same area.

Fidelis Corporation Update

Mark Double met WV Department of Agriculture Deputy Director, **Aime Minor**, at a soil conservation meeting in Preston County in October. Their discussion centered around the uncertainty regarding the former Clement's tree nursery in Mason County. Aime stated that she would look into the matter and get back to the WV chapter.

We finally heard from her, and she indicated that the sale of the Clement's property was rather quick. This was more than a year ago. She is still unaware of the timeline for Fidelis as to whether they plan to break ground in 2026 or five years from now. The issue is that we utilize the 200 or so American chestnut trees at Clements for nut harvest. We would like to know more about the genetics of those trees, but it makes no sense to go to the trouble of extracting DNA from many of the trees and then have the DNA analyzed

(at an expense), only to have the trees removed next year. If Fidelis has no immediate plans for the chestnut trees, it would be good to know more about the makeup of the trees that we are using as native Americans. There is a Chinese chestnut nearby, so it is unlikely that all the trees from which we harvest are 100% American. Chestnuts are wind-pollinated, so there is a good chance that the American orchard is contaminated to some degree with Chinese pollen. What we do not know is to what extent.

The trees at Clements all suffer from chestnut blight cankers. Some trees have very unusual cankers, indicating there may be some limited level of resistance. Below are photos of some of the Clements chestnut trees.



A Clement's chestnut tree with swollen cankers. The lower canker on the left stem has nearly closed due to callus tissue.



Clement's tree with rough bark and no visible killing cankers.

WAJR Radio in Morgantown

Mike Nolting, a radio host for WAJR in Morgantown, does a morning talk show from 9:00-10:00 am. That hour averages about 4,600 listeners in north-central WV. A local soil conservation group championed the Dunstan hybrid as a tree that is good for American chestnut restoration. That sentiment was carried on both local television stations and in local newspapers. That was probably the impetus for Mike Nolting to reach out to the WV chapter. Since WAJR is based in Morgantown, **Mark Double** agreed to an in-studio interview. Interestingly, Mark was called into the radio studio only 2 minutes before air, so there was very little time to know what Mike was going to ask. As it turned out, the issue with the Dunstan hybrid never surfaced. Mark talked a little about TACF's goals for restoration and a little history of the impact of the chestnut blight fungus. However, the 15 minute segment came to an abrupt halt, without having the opportunity to give a web address for the WV chapter in the event listeners had questions.

Two listeners did reach out after the segment aired. One comment was that the information on American chestnut was the best segment that listener has heard in years. Another listener wrote to state that she has three chestnut trees, and she believes that one of them is American. Mark followed up and asked for photos of the trees, leaves and twigs to help discern if the trees are American.

Dunstan Hybrid Chestnut

Many West Virginians have heard of the Dunstan hybrid, and many have purchased that tree from local box stores, at a cost of \$20-\$60, depending on the size. The history of the Dunstan hybrid goes back to the 1950s when **Dr. Robert Dunstan** of Greensboro, NC was an active member of the Northern Nut Growers Association (NNGA). Another member of NNGA, **James Carpenter**, had a surviving American chestnut in Salem, OH. Dunstan took the scion from the Carpenter's American chestnut and top-grafted it to chestnut rootstock. Dunstan had planted the grafted tree near Chinese chestnut cultivars 'Meiling', 'Nanking', and 'Kuling'. These grafted trees were allowed to open-pollinate with the Chinese cultivars, and Dunstan planted these F1 seeds and grew them to flowering. Those trees were then outcrossed with the three Chinese cultivars listed above and thirty of the resultant seedlings were taken by Dunstan to his retirement farm in Florida. These trees showed a mix of American and Chinese traits. In the 1980s, **Bob Wallace**, Dunstan's grandson, commenced planting a 500 tree chestnut orchard on Dunstan farm in Alachua, Florida.

The genotype (genetic makeup) of the Dunstan hybrid is unknown, but the trees are mostly Chinese chestnut given the open pollination with the three Chinese chestnut cultivars. Named cultivars of Dunstan hybrids have been produced ('Revival', 'Willamette', 'Carolina', and 'Carpenter'); they were bred for nut size and nut taste.

For growers interested in nut production for wildlife, the Dunstan hybrid is a fine tree. Is the Dunstan hybrid useful in TACF's backcross program? The short answer is no, as TACF is trying to breed resistance into American chestnut and keep American chestnut form. The Dunstan hybrids will not be able to compete with the native trees in our eastern North American woodlands.

The Dunstan trees sold are seedlings, and seedlings will exhibit characteristics of both parents. For a tree that will look exactly like a parent tree and/or be exactly a certain cultivar, you need to get a tree that has been vegetatively-propagated. For chestnuts, that usually means a grafted tree.

For a thorough write-up on Dunstan hybrids, **Sara Fitzsimmons** wrote a very good article in ***Chestnut***, A Journal of The American Chestnut Foundation, Winter 2016, Issue 1, Vol. 30, pages 21-23.



Sam Muncy with hot roasted chestnuts at Fort New Salem.

Fort New Salem

Hot, roasted chestnuts have been available for 10 years to those attending the *Spirit of Christmas in the Mountains* at Fort New Salem in Harrison County. The Fort has 17 relocated log structures on an eight-acre campus that opened to the public in 1974. In addition to the log cabins the campus also has two gardens and three pavilions. Dressed in period costume, the Salem, WV festival has a variety of volunteers who represent frontier settlements of the 19th Century. Children and adults alike can witness a tinsmith, print shop, an apothecary, a weaver, candle making, blacksmith and a puppet show. There are cookie decorating opportunities, a toy shop, fireplace donuts and of course, thanks to **Sam Muncy** and **Sharon Cottrill**, hot roasted chestnuts. Sam (the WV chapter treasurer) and Sharon work the last weekend in November and the first weekend in December roasting chestnuts for the visitors. Unlike many of the artisans who work indoors in the log cabins, Sam and Sharon are on the grounds of the Fort, outdoors in often very cold weather. Sam roasts about 50 pounds of nuts--25 pounds each weekend. Many visitors have never had a roasted chestnut, so Sam and Sharon are great ambassadors as they not only provide chestnuts to eat, but they are educators as well, detailing the story of the American chestnut.

WV chapter Board of Director, **Carla Kesling** also volunteers, but she is in the apothecary shop making sachets bags.

In addition to roasting chestnuts for visitors, Sam and Sharon have planted a few chestnut trees on the Fort's campus. Both Sam and Sharon have dedicated themselves to

this mission and the WV chapter owes them a huge debt of gratitude for their efforts in promoting American chestnut to the public.



Sam Muncy and Sharon Cottrill at Fort New Salem.

Getting Ready to Pot

The chestnuts that were harvested in September are in cold storage (34-36°F) awaiting spring. The nuts should begin to produce a radical in mid-to-late February. While the nuts are still enjoying a cold period, there are many activities that are taking place in order to get ready for potting this spring.



One thousand D40 pots at the WVU greenhouse awaiting labeling.

Dr. Lewis Cook, WV chapter Board of Directors member, hauled 1,000 pots and stands from TACF's Meadowview Research Farm several years ago to his home in Fayette County. TACF decided to use larger pots for their work, and they gave away, free-of-charge, their old D40 pots and stands. Lewis met Mark Double this spring in Weston to hand off the 1,000 pots for use at the WVU greenhouse. It can be a bit chaotic during potting making sure every pot is labeled correctly, so in December, Mark Double labeled all 1,600 pots prior to potting the end of February. The WV chapter has chestnuts from 18 different 'Mother Trees'. Knowing how many nuts are from each tree, Mark labeled the appropriate number of pots per tree. Using colored tape, it makes distribution in May easier when the different pots are marked with colors.

Despite Lewis' contribution of 1,000 pots, additional pots will have to be ordered along with potting soil. The WV chapter uses the recommendation from TACF, in that we use BK55 potting soil. This particular mix is 55% pine bark, and it contains less peat moss than other potting mixes. Too much peat moss retains water that can cause the roots to rot if the soil is too wet. The added pine bark reduces the amount of peat moss making for a good medium for chestnuts to grow.

While we would like WV chapter members to assist with potting chestnuts, there are only three potting tables available in the greenhouse, so we have to limit the number of volunteers. A potting crew has already been identified for February.

TACF Volunteer Service Award Winners

Four individuals were chosen by TACF to be recognized for their volunteer efforts. All four winners were interviewed by TACF's new President/CEO, **Michael Goergen**. Those 30-minute interviews were edited to 7-9 minutes by **Hal Brindley**, TACF's web manager and viewed on the 12 December 2025 *Chestnut Chat*. The four winners are: **Jeff White** (Maryland chapter); **Dr. Florian Carle** (Connecticut chapter); **Mark Double** (West Virginia chapter); and **Dr. Han Chuan Ong** (Tennessee chapter).

Florian is the secretary and research coordinator for the Connecticut chapter. He is the manager of the Yale Quantum Institute in New Haven, CT. Florian is from Marseille, France. After spending his childhood in southern France harvesting and eating chestnuts at every occasion, Florian moved to New Haven for work in 2014 and realized American chestnuts are not as ubiquitous than their European counterpart. He is delighted to join the CT Chapter to help restore this amazing tree.

Jeff White is the president of the Maryland chapter, and he joined TACF to be part of the restoration cause. He initially volunteered to be the chapter vice-president, knowing that position requires little effort. Unknowingly, Jeff was then tapped to be the chapter president!

Mark Double is the past president of the WV chapter and the newsletter editor. Mark and his wife, along with new WV chapter board member, **Amy Metheny**, are responsible for raising the chestnut seedlings at the West Virginia University greenhouse for distribution to WV chapter members across the State of WV. The final honoree is **Dr. Han Chuan Ong** from King University in Bristol, TN. Han is an active member of the TN chapter. At King University, Han teaches the following courses: Principles of Biology; General Biology, Genetics; Molecular Biology; and Evolutionary Biology. Han and his King University Plant Biology class volunteer at TACF's Meadowview Research Farms during the harvest processing.

Quarterly Meetings

At the Rowlesburg chestnut festival in October, **Cassie Stark**, TACF's Mid-Atlantic Regional Science Coordinator, proposed a quarterly meeting with a few members of the WV chapter. Cassie felt it would be an opportunity to make coordinated plans for the chapter. The first meeting was held via Zoom on 21 November 2025. The topics of discussion were: Recurrent Genomic Selection plantings; distributor of BK55 potting mix; a potential chapter intern for 2026; and plans for the Summit Bechtel Reserve chestnut plantings.

The WV chapter will be the recipient of two Recurrent Genomic Selection (Best X Best) plantings in 2026. The two plantings will be established at the nursery bottom in Parsons (adjacent to the U.S. Forest Service office in Tucker County), and in Burnsville in association with **Brian Carson** and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Braxton County. Suggested planting dates will be early May. The plantings will occur on back-to-back days to accommodate Cassie's schedule. It is hoped that the planting holes at both sites will be augured prior to the

planting dates. The seedlings will be planted randomly in pre-designated locations. Planting dates will be advertised through the WV chapter, the national TACF website, and Facebook to solicit volunteers.

For the past several years, the WV chapter has ordered its potting mix in conjunction with orders from the West Virginia University greenhouse. Since the greenhouse already purchases large quantities of potting mix, the greenhouse staff included the WV chapter's order in with theirs. The problem has been that for three consecutive years, we have received the wrong potting mix. We order BK-55, a mix that contains 55% pine bark, but that is not what we have received. We have been receiving a Pro-Mix with mycorrhizae, a potting mix that contains a lot more peat moss. After three years, it was time to make a change and order our own potting mix. Cassie Stark recommended Griffin Greenhouse Supply in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. An order was placed in early January.

At the Rowlesburg chestnut festival, **Sam Muncy** gave a presentation on the status of the many chestnut plantings at the Summit Bechtel Reserve (SBR). Sam made the plea for some concrete plans as to how to proceed with his plantings at the SBR, some of which contain the soil-borne *Phytophthora* organism, a destroyer of chestnut roots. Cassie provided Sam with two potential fungicides to control *Phytophthora*, Reliant® and Subdue-Maxx®. Cassie will provide Sam with some goals and guidelines. Sam indicated that the roadside SBR plantings are doing the best. Sam will develop activities to monitor the trees at the Console Bridge site to take data on surviving trees. The North Fire Ring may be the most productive site at the SBR. Sam has an area of about 1 acre that he wants to fence for protection of deer.

In 2000, the WV chapter hired a summer intern, but the individual who was hired spent more time working for his father who is a consulting forester than he did for the WV chapter. Of the 80 sites of hybrid trees and more than 20 germplasm conservation orchards throughout the State of WV, we have little-to-no information on many of the sites, some of which were planted in the late 1990s. Discussion has centered around hiring an intern in the summer of 2026 to visit many of the chestnut plantings in the state. Cassie Stark, Bernie Coyle, Sam Muncy and Mark Double worked for several weeks to develop a flyer for the intern, as seen on the following page.

Paid Internship: Summer 2026

The WV chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (WV-TACF) is looking for a summer intern to locate and assess nearly 100 chestnut plantings in the State of West Virginia.



Internship duties will include:

- Locate and assess the 100 chestnut sites across the State of WV using an Excel spreadsheet that details the location of the sites.
- Provide GPS coordinates and a written description of how to locate each site and include the contact information of the property owner/manager.
- Provide an assessment of the overall site including the number of living trees, flowering, bur production, evidence of the chestnut blight fungus and the number of living stems.
- Provide photographs of the overall site and specific trees of interest.

Requirements:

- Some training in forestry, horticulture, biology, or related fields.
- Good written and oral communication skills and strong time-management skills.
- Ability to arrange site visits, locate GPS coordinates and work independently.
- Make an oral presentation of findings at the WV chapter meeting in Rowlesburg, October 11, 2026.
- Travel throughout West Virginia will be required. Candidate **MUST** have own vehicle and current driver's license and their own GPS/smartphone.
- Candidate must be willing to work with a flexible schedule, with some overnight travel.

To Apply:

The **internship pays \$15/hour with a \$1000 travel stipend** for approximately 11 weeks of work (40 hr/wk). The internship has no home base. The intern will work out of their home with occasional overnight stays at the homes of WV-TACF chapter members throughout the state. A more detailed description of intern duties is available on-request. To apply by email, send a letter of interest, resume, and three references to WV chapter president, Bernie Coyle (bfcogle@hotmail.com). The deadline is February 22, 2026.



If you know of an individual who might be interested in the summer internship, contact Bernie Coyle with the email detailed in the flyer.

Cassie Stark's New Role in TACF

Cassie Stark has accepted a promotion with TACF. She will be stepping into the role of **Director of Science Implementation**. She will be managing the regional team and our Recurrent Genomic Selection plan nationally.

She will be hiring a new Mid-Atlantic RSC as soon as possible. Cassie still be around and to train the new hire, but her role will be different. In the meantime, she will be operating in both roles with limited capacity for Mid-Atlantic RSC, focusing on priority tasks.



Cassie Stark

In addition to Cassie's promotion, there has been another change at TACF. The Southern Regional Science Coordinator, **Jamie Van Clief** left TACF for American Forests. Thus, TACF is looking to hire two positions. The announcement for the positions is as follows:

"TACF is hiring both a Mid-Atlantic and Southern Regional Science Coordinator. Support volunteer-led science programs, work hands-on with chestnut restoration, and connect regional chapters with national research efforts. If you have experience with tree breeding and selection

programs, leading volunteer events, orchard management, or are passionate about the return of American chestnut to its native range, we encourage you to apply. The link to apply and more details can be found here: <https://tacf.org/employment/>".

Annual Wild-Type Seed Sale

While the WV chapter offers 3-month-old chestnut seedlings to its members free-of-charge, there is another venue for nuts. The American Chestnut Foundation will offer wild-type nuts through their annual seed sale. The date is **Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 9 am**.

The cost per package of 10 seeds is \$50, including shipping. (One bundle per customer.) This is an extremely popular annual sale exclusively for current TACF members. Seed quantities are limited and are for sale while supplies last. Seeds may sell out quickly.

Please note that your membership or renewal must be received by March 1 and remain current through March 17 to be eligible to participate in the seedling sale.

The benefits of wild-type seeds vs. seedlings

- More abundant supply for sale
- Substantially lower price
- Availability west of the Mississippi River
- Germinating from seed in your native soil eliminates transplant shock and promotes faster establishment
- Growing a tree from seed can be a magical and rewarding experience!

