

Media release for the Garden Centre Association

Expanded Rising Star prog to launch at GCA conference

THE GARDEN Centre Association's (GCA) innovative Rising Stars programme sponsored by Westland Horticulture will be expanded further this year (2014) due to its successes in 2013.

The GCA and Westland Horticulture will unveil their plans for the coming year at the industry body's annual conference, which takes place from January 26 until 29 in Blackpool.

Iain Wylie, Chief Executive of the GCA, said: "Our innovative Rising Stars programme sponsored by Westland Horticulture has had a tremendously successful year and looks set to be bigger and better in 2014.

"From discussions with Westland, we are aiming to involve a larger group to participate in the workshops throughout 2014. Our two 2013 winners will also do presentations at the event to provide an insight into all they have learnt, the benefits of entering for themselves personally and also for the garden centres where they work."

More than 30 garden centre staff have now been involved in the GCA driven initiative. But last year it was revamped adding value for the participants and their employers, and making it a beneficial experience for all.

Keith Nicholson, Marketing Director of Westland Horticulture, said: "The 2013 Rising Stars Programme was launched at the GCA Conference in January last year and 12 applicants were shortlisted to four for the full programme, these were all go-getting ambitious individuals – two were promoted within their businesses during the year. As the whole process was so successful, in 2014 we're hoping for a greater number of applicants.

"This will allow more delegates to benefit from the workshops and the conference. They all have the potential of a great future in garden retail as the industry's next generation of managers."

The 2013 winning candidates, who will be presented with their trophies at the Conference, George Bishop, Assistant Manager, Squires Woking and Will Michieli, Plant Advisor, Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre in Somerset, will produce and present short presentations at the GCA Conference 2014.

During their presentations they will explain what they did, how it helped them and how it improved their garden centre.

George said: "We have become much more proactive. Planning ahead more, being ready to change displays and product placing if the weather changes. We bought more stock when the weather was getting better.

“We used strict types of display for the purpose, which worked very well. We involved the team as much as possible and they responded well – with passion for the job! The layout changes we made make it easier to shop. I can now think like a customer more – and aim to make it easier for customers to shop and spend.”

Will, who is one of the youngest members of the team at Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre, also gave an inspiring presentation.

He said: “We tightened up on stock control. We made sure we had the right product in the right place. Hot spots are vital. We worked on the average spend and now understand net profit, and the effect we can have on it.

“Realising the importance of linking with other departments and cross merchandising. The effect of getting the right plant in the right place at the right time is amazing – it can double or even triple the sales. I now realise how vital the personal touch is and how it affects what people spend on the day. I am now looking ahead to 2014 with new ideas for improved POS signs.”

The 2013 programme included three seasonal workshops facilitated by Ian Boardman, which were sponsored by Westland Horticulture. These were aimed at increasing awareness of key merchandising skills and then those involved were able to try these ideas back at their own garden centres.

Ian said: “But they also did more than this and were challenged to deliver measurable results, for example increasing sales, in their centres, based on what they had learnt. This was followed up by a review of the results, then planning the next season and so on. This had a tremendous impact on their garden centres as well as the entrants’ own personal development.”

Anyone interested in applying for the 2014 programme should contact the GCA on 0118 930 8918. Alternatively, please visit www.gca.org.uk, log on to www.facebook.com/GardenCentreAssociation or follow the organisation on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GC_Association.

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For further media details, please call Porcupine PR on 01278 446801 or email Capella@porcupinepr.co.uk. Alternatively, please contact Iain Wylie, GCA Chief Executive on 07843 633408 or email Iain@gca.org.uk.

Photograph caption one: 2013 Rising Stars Programme winner Will Michieli, Plant Advisor, Monkton Elm Garden & Pet Centre, Taunton, Somerset.

Photograph caption two: George Bishop, Assistant Manager at Squires Woking, who was one of the winners of the 2013 Rising Stars Programme.

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