

**Media release for the Garden Centre Association**

# **Two garden centre staff sponsored for IGCA Congress**

THE GARDEN Centre Association (GCA) Trust has announced this month (March, 2017) that not one but two candidates this year will go to the International Garden Centre Association (IGCA) Congress.

The GCA Trust recently invited applications from employees of member garden centres to receive a sponsored place at the IGCA in September.

Sue Allen, Trust Chairman said: “Eight candidates applied and all were of exceptionally high standard, making the choice very hard for the Trustees, to the point where they decided for the first time to send two lucky delegates to the IGCA, which will be held this year in the Niagara Falls region of Canada. I’m delighted to reveal that Zoe Willis of Perrywood Garden Centre and Liz Dowling of Millbrook Garden Centre were both selected.

“As a regular attendee of the IGCA Congress for many years, I appreciate just how much can be gained from the experience, not just in learning about how garden retailers in other countries respond to challenges in their own market place, but also in meeting and sharing knowledge with delegates from the other 18 member countries.

“It continues to surprise and dismay me when I realise how many strong members of the GCA do not take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the annual Congress. It is telling that all this year’s applicants for the award came from centres who already fully appreciate the benefits of the international organisation.

“Mark Scott from Gordale, who won the place in 2016, can confirm that the experience was truly life-changing and his employers Jill and Peter Nicholson were delighted to benefit from his enthusiasm and new ideas upon his return.”

The object of the GCA Trust is to advance among the general public and, in particular among horticultural students, education in horticulture, and particularly garden centres, by the provision and administration of scholarships and bursaries, including prizes to foster such education.

A delighted Zoe explained: “I’d just like to say how excited I am with getting a place to go to congress, it is fantastic opportunity.”

Zoe is now looking forward to liaising with Liz, who is a Brand Manager at Millbrook Garden Centre, to discuss their forthcoming trip together.

Simon Bourne, Garden Centre Manager at Perrywood Garden Centre, said: “We are so happy for Zoe. She loves travelling and meeting people and is potty about plants,

so we know she is going to love the Canada trip. We can't wait to see what she posts on social media and the ideas she then brings back to the rest of the team. It's an amazing opportunity - huge thanks to the GCA Trust."

The Trust also aims to assist horticultural students to study, research into and gain experience of horticulture and landscaping.

Liz, who is based at Crowborough, said: "I am so excited to have won a place on the trip to Canada, the itinerary looks amazing and I can't wait to go! I am looking forward to meeting other people within the industry and seeing the garden centres and nurseries in Canada. What a fantastic opportunity!"

For further information, please call the GCA on 01244 952170. Alternatively, please visit [www.gca.org.uk](http://www.gca.org.uk), log on to [www.facebook.com/pages/GardenCentreAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/pages/GardenCentreAssociation) or follow the organisation on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/GC\\_Association](https://www.twitter.com/GC_Association).

**ENDS**

**For further media details, please call Porcupine PR on 01278 446801 or email [Rachel@porcupinepr.co.uk](mailto:Rachel@porcupinepr.co.uk).**

**Photograph caption one:** Zoe Willis from Perrywood Garden Centre.

**Photograph caption two:** (left to right) Liz Dowling, Brand Manager with Tammy Woodhouse, Managing Director of Millbrook Garden Centre.