



Meghan McPhee

Down the garden path

MEGHAN MCPHEE of Boothbay, Maine, graduated from high school in 2000 with a plan to study theater in college as preparation for an acting career. But when she moved to Kentucky for a short time and grew rosebushes as a hobby, fond childhood memories of time spent outside with her grandmother came rushing back.

“(Changing majors) was actually probably one of the best moves I’ve ever made in my life,” says McPhee, who will graduate in May with a degree in landscape horticulture from the University of Maine. “UMaine has definitely given me a lot of opportunities and a lot of exposure that I never would have had. (The department) has allowed me to move forward with a dream.”

The 27-year-old, who is president of the UMaine Horticulture Club and the campus chapter of PLANET (the Professional Landcare Network), recently was one of eight student ambassadors from across the country selected to attend this year’s Green Industry Conference in Louisville, Ky.

The three-day conference was hosted by PLANET, an international association of lawn care professionals, landscape management contractors, designers and builders, and interior plantscapers. The organization has about 4,000 member firms.

Meghan McPhee’s networking opportunities continue in March when she and eight other UMaine students head to California State Polytechnic University for the PLANET 2009 Student Career Days competition.

At the conference, McPhee and the other student ambassadors helped with event logistics and participated in a networking session with industry leaders.

“It was like speed dating, but for jobs,” she says. “I met some great companies for some possible jobs down the road.”

After graduation, McPhee hopes to find a job with a landscape design company on the East Coast where she can focus on residential design, which she describes as interior design for the outside.

“You’re extending the inside living space outside,” McPhee says. “You’re not as restricted. It’s more creative and your clients are willing to listen and are usually very flexible.”

While interning last summer with Leahy Landscaping on the north shore of Massachusetts, McPhee had a chance to work on her favorite type of design project — a Cape Cod with a relatively free-flowing landscape design that reminded her of home. The style typically incorporates a lot of tall grasses that move and swish like waves. Plant material features shades of pink, purple and blue.

“The color palette is kind of that muted Impressionist Monet,” McPhee says. “It gives you that hazy, Sunday-morning-coast-in-Maine feeling.”