

## Pursuing a lifelong dream, student is grateful for MGV scholarship

By Colleen Callahan

Walking through gardens at the end of the day is one of Nicholas Peter's favorite passions.

"I love looking at the changes in plant migrations, what needs pruning, seeing the whole growth process and the designing results," he says.

This joy of discovery led Nicholas, 20, to major in Horticulture/Landscape Design at UW-River Falls two years ago.

Raised in Athens, Wis., a rural community near Wausau, Nicholas was active in FFA and the 4-H Gardening Club, whose leader was a MGV. The club's projects included maintaining plots in local parks and hosting garden walks.

Community involvement is important to Nicholas. "I enjoy interacting with and educating the public very much." Perhaps that's the reason he contemplates working at a botanic garden one day. That would mean getting a Master's Degree in Public Horticulture. He's researching graduate schools now, and if those classes are anything like his undergraduate courses, Nicholas will have a great time.

Right now, he's excited about a research project on the timing and type of pinching of chrysanthemums. He's also taking twin courses on native shrubs and staple perennials, where students must walk through campus identifying dozens of species.

One of his favorites is *Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass. "It's a staple plant, gives structure for summer and makes a good backdrop."

Nicholas incorporates backdrops into his landscape design at home where he creates a gradual flow from manicured to natural settings. "The landscape beds



***Nicholas holds samples of a research project from his Greenhouse Management course. The class received 'Pittsburgh Purple' chrysanthemum cultivars as 1-inch cuttings and are testing two pinching practices: when to pinch and how much to pinch to encourage more blooms. The plant on the right was pinched soft (buds only) on Sept. 11. The plant on the left was pinched hard (apical leaves) two weeks later. Although the plant on the left is shorter, it's fuller and will likely produce more blossoms.***

near the house are more structured, but as they work outward, I let them intertwine and be free."

Nicholas also plants day lilies and spireas. "I'm a fan of spireas," he says. "They're staple and maintainable. I leave them for three years and then mow them to the ground to rejuvenate."

Nicholas credits both sets of grandparents for turning him into a gardener. "I grew up helping in the vegetable and flower gardens, and I help them still today," he says. "I check on everything when I go home. I just pruned my grandmother's hydrangea."

Being a few hours from home was one reason

Nicholas selected UW-River Falls. "Madison and River Falls are the only ones in the state with a Horticulture major," he says. "River Falls is smaller and closer, and in high school I got to know some UW-RF professors at FFA events."

Nicholas has nothing but praise for his teachers. And one of them, Diana Alfuth, Pierce County UW-Extension Horticulture Educator, was delighted to hear that he received the SCVMGA scholarship. "I had Nick in my Landscape Design class and he is a wonderful and enthusiastic student and person," she says. "He's very talented and motivated."

For Nicholas, the \$1,000 scholarship means more than financial aid for himself. It's about the impact it has on the field, he says, because "the MG scholarship encourages students to pursue horticulture as a lifelong career." In a thank-you note, he wrote: "It is truly you [SCVMGA] and your dedication to keep education at the forefront that keeps the horticultural industry green and growing."