

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

Insights

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Fond Farewell to Nancy Cusumano

Late in the afternoon on April 30, 2022, Nancy Cusumano, longtime program/extension aide for the Northeastern IPM Center, wrapped up her work for the day. In a sense, it was much like any other workday, but this time, something was different.

It was the last time she'd ever do this. Because tomorrow was to be her first day of retirement.

Springtime in the Northeast—and particularly in the largely unspoiled natural surroundings of Ithaca, New York, where Cornell University and therefore the Center are based—is a time of transition, rebirth, and new beginnings. A vibrantly verdant hue returns to the fields, woods, and hillsides as the last vestiges of winter are washed away by the spring rains, the long nights and chilly days banished by the warming weather and ever-increasing daylight.

It is perhaps fitting, then, that Nancy chose this time of year for her own new beginning and the start of a new adventure.

Growing Up, Childhood Travel and the Performing Arts

The oldest of five siblings, Nancy was born in Kentucky on an Army base where her father was stationed. But she lived there only until age two and grew up mostly in the New York City metro area on Long Island.

Her father later became a teacher, which gave them the opportunity to travel extensively during the summers. "I credit those childhood trips with inspiring and cultivating the passion for travel that I enjoy to this day," she says.



Nancy Cusumano, longtime program/extension aide for the Northeastern IPM Center, retired in May 2022.

In high school, Nancy became involved with musicals and discovered an interest in theater. "I was all backstage," she says. "No acting for me." She built on that by majoring in technical theater at SUNY Stony Brook, where she trained as a stage manager—the person responsible for running shows during rehearsals and performances. "I always had a knack for it," she says, "but the training solidified my attention to detail and organizational skills that I'd go on to use throughout my career."

Previous Work

After moving to New York's Finger Lakes region in 1990, Nancy worked for Cornell in alumni affairs and development. After several years there, she returned to her roots, serving as props manager for the university's theater, dance, and film department, before moving on to other Cornell units, including Cornell Botanic Gardens.

In 2007, she left Cornell to pursue other interests and started her own dog-grooming business, The Grooming Room, which was voted Best Groomer in a 2012 *Ithaca Times* poll. But after five years, she decided it was time to move on. "I wore myself out grooming," she says. "I had to close my business."

In May 2013, she started her job at the Center.

Time at the Center

Nancy saw the Northeastern IPM Center as a logical next step for her career. "When I saw the position, I felt it aligned with my longstanding interest in nature

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Contact Us

607-255-8815

northeastipm@cornell.edu

Cusumano

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and environmental issues, so I applied,” she says. Although she came into the job not knowing much about integrated pest management specifically, she was a quick study because of how IPM is founded on many of the same principles she already held dear.

If there was any learning curve she found particularly steep, it was the Center’s funding model. “I was brand new to the whole grant world,” she says. “I had never been funded by grants nor knew anything about how they were managed. It took some getting used to the terminology and reporting requirements, and also tracking the Partnership Grants that the Center distributes to IPM projects throughout the Northeast.”

“When I saw the Northeastern IPM Center position, I felt it aligned with my longstanding interest in nature and environmental issues.”

Reflecting on the lighter moments, she recalls the brown mar-morated stink bug (BMSB) identification kits the Center created and sent upon request. One of the items included in the kit was a dead stink bug stored in a bottle of hand sanitizer for preservation purposes. Nancy had to request that researchers send her their deceased specimens, which arrived in large bottles of formaldehyde filled with them. She then had to transfer the bugs, one by one, from those containers into the small sanitizer bottles.

It was a tedious task accompanied by—to put it mildly—a variety of smells, which had a lasting impact. “I got to the point where the smell of hand sanitizer and the smell of dead BMSB were the same to me. When COVID-19 came along and we were all using sanitizer so much, I really had a hard time with that . . . and still do!”

Beyond the challenges, the successes, and the amusing stories, what Nancy recalls most vividly are the working relationships she forged over the years—both at the Center and beyond. “I miss the connections I made with colleagues at the other IPM centers and with universities throughout the region and across the country,” she says. “The people who sent me items for the *IPM News and Events Roundup* time and time again, the regional IPM discussions, former director Carrie Koplinka-Loehr and current director Deborah Grantham . . . these are the connections that I will always carry with me.”

Life Outside Work and Beyond

Retirement gives Nancy an opportunity to focus wholeheartedly on the interests and passions she always cultivated outside of work.

“I’ve been involved in animal rescue one way or another for many years,” she says. “I started out fostering kittens and dogs for the Tompkins County SPCA and Cayuga Dog Rescue. I’ve also been involved in rescues of horses as well as other animals. Currently, I am a board member for Saoirse Pastures, the only not-for-profit in Tompkins County that deals with farm animals.”

“I also kayak, garden, and have really too many hobbies for my own good!”



“I miss the connections I made with colleagues throughout the region and across the country—the connections that I will always carry with me.”

Her interest in kayaking proved serendipitous when Nancy met her husband-to-be, Steve, in 2010 through the kayak club where they both were members. They married two years later.

They also share an interest in travel, one that they intend to pursue to the fullest now that they’re both retired. “In 2020, we purchased a small travel trailer, and early next year, we and our dogs will be hitting the road, long-term, heading south and west.”

Steve was in the Navy and has been all over the world, but he’s never seen all the U.S. has to offer. The extensive traveling Nancy did as a child took her across the country, including to many national parks, and she hopes to show her husband many of the same places she visited as a child.

Conversely, her first trip abroad was their honeymoon in Scotland. They hope to do more traveling outside the U.S. as well, especially to Italy and Sicily, where her family emigrated from.

Welcoming Jerrie Haines

What's Left Behind

It could be said that the measure of a person's impact is how acutely their absence is felt. Throughout Nancy's nine years at the Center, she made lasting impressions on numerous colleagues and stakeholders through her many talents and contributions.

The Center's program/extension aide position is distinct in its breadth and diversity of responsibilities. Although it includes the bulk of administrative and logistical duties, it would not be accurate to call it an administrative assistant position. It's involved in just about everything the Center does, including handling certain communication tasks.

Nancy managed the Center's social media channels—primarily Facebook and Twitter—promoting Center news, sharing outside information, and engaging thoughtfully with the public on emerging issues. In 2019, she launched the *IPM News and Events Roundup*, a weekly e-mail newsletter that compiles links to news, research, funding and career opportunities, and more throughout the world of IPM.

"It is no exaggeration or cliché to say the Center won't be the same without Nancy," said Deborah G. Grantham, Center director. "This in no way reflects on anybody who conceivably could have succeeded her, nor on any other member of our small, tight-knit team. But Nancy demonstrated how someone can take a role and truly make it their own, leaving a unique, indelible mark. She will be missed."

Recalling her theater work, Nancy emphasized her focus on backstage operations to the exclusion of any actual acting. In some ways, that may serve as a metaphor for Nancy's efforts for the Center—working diligently behind the scenes to keep things on track and help the group shine. But it may actually sell her work a bit short, considering the reach and visibility she achieved. Perhaps she proved more at home in the spotlight than she gave herself credit for.

"Nancy demonstrated how someone can take a role and truly make it their own, leaving a unique, indelible mark. She will be missed."

— Deborah G. Grantham, director, Northeastern IPM Center

The Center is confident we speak for many colleagues, partners, and stakeholders when we say we're deeply grateful for the many ways Nancy contributed as part of our team. We wish her all the best in retirement, and in all her adventures yet to come.

The Center set up a Kudoboard to provide anybody who wishes it an opportunity to leave a note for Nancy. If you'd like to add something to the board, please visit www.kudoboard.com/boards/OYr6Cw42.

What is it about human nature that draws us to paradoxes and riddles? The allure of the challenge? The mystique of the unanswerable question?

One such question is, "How do you replace someone who's irreplaceable?" Perhaps this was one of many questions on Jerrie Haines's mind the morning of June 6, 2022, her first day as program/extension aide for the Northeastern IPM Center—a position that had recently been vacated when the incomparable Nancy Cusumano retired after nine years.

Undoubtedly, getting up to speed in any new job entails a certain learning curve and period of unknowns, regardless of the legacy left by one's predecessor. But if one thing was certain, it was that Jerrie came into the position with the same determination that led her to pursue it in the first place. She had the background, the skills, the interests, and the desire to make the most of this new opportunity.



Jerrie Haines joined the Northeastern IPM Center as program/extension aide in June 2022.

Family Heritage and Local History

Jerrie has deep connections to the Ithaca, New York, area where Cornell University—the Northeastern IPM Center's host institution—is based. She is from the small community of McLean, a mere dozen miles from the university campus.

"I have a brother, a sister, and three stepsisters, and I'm extremely close to my family," she says. "And my husband of 13 years, Steve, and I are immeasurably proud of the blended family we've successfully raised together. I have a daughter, who lives in Florida, and a stepson, who's in the Army. He and his wife recently welcomed a new baby."

The Haines family were potato farmers who moved to the area from Maine. History tells that they were a prominent Quaker family that helped run the last stop on the Underground Railroad before Canada, just northeast of Maple Grove, Maine.

The other side of Jerrie's family is just as rich in history, as she is a descendant of Ezra Cornell, who founded the eponymous university in 1865. "My grandfather could have gone to Cornell for free," she says. "Ezra was his great-great uncle."

The Service and Early Career

After high school, Jerrie was undecided about how she wanted to further her education, so she "chose to go to the school of hard knocks," as she describes it, and joined the Army, much as her stepson would later do. She was stationed in Germany as a communications specialist for the brigade. "I thoroughly enjoyed my time while serving," she says. "To this day, I thank the Army for my discipline, team spirit, and work ethic."

Following discharge, she attended a two-year school where she pursued business and computer science.

Earlier in her career, Jerrie mainly held office-type positions, until she was made a field manager for a now-defunct local tree farm. From there, she got into greenhouse work, which fortuitously provided a primer on integrated pest management—both what it is, and why it makes sense.

“Once I was in the greenhouse environment, I really gravitated towards the integrated pest management portion of my job,” she says. “I was fascinated by ‘good bugs eating bad bugs’ and learning about the different aspects of IPM. And the cherry on top was that once I developed my IPM skills, I no longer had to suit up and spray pesticides. My good bugs were doing their job!”

A Career Change and an Opportunity at the Center

At the time the program/extension aide position at the Center became available, it dovetailed with the direction Jerrie was considering taking her career. “I was hoping to find somewhere that I could contribute my IPM knowledge but return more to the office and administrative side of things,” she says. “When I saw the position at the Center posted, I was beyond hopeful that I would be considered.”

“This position has given me new ways to feel I can really make a difference.”

Jerrie’s bifurcated background in both office and field work—including personal experience using IPM—made her a unique candidate for the Center. The mission of the regional IPM centers is more about facilitating and fostering IPM than it is about implementing it, and IPM expertise is generally not a prerequisite. Center staff tend to specialize in areas such as grants, communications, web administration, and evaluation, and we work to support, fund, inform, and coordinate among IPM researchers and practitioners within the region.

However, a background in IPM and field work combined with administrative and communication skills honed earlier in her career meant not only that Jerrie had the tools to succeed in the position, but also that she had a personal connection to the Center’s mission. She knew firsthand what it’s like to manage pests in a field or greenhouse setting and how IPM encourages a science-based, least-risk approach.

Now about a half-year into the position, Jerrie is sufficiently far along to reflect on the experience so far. “The administrative side of the job has just been a gradual familiarization with methods and processes I’d used before,” she recalls. “There were times early on when I felt a bit overwhelmed by the wide variety of tasks, mainly because I found myself in an ‘I don’t know what I don’t know’ situation. But my new co-workers have always been happy to lend me tips and pointers, while the documentation that Nancy left has been valuable beyond words. She was my Rand McNally and she left me a map like no other!”

“Variety of tasks” is key. The program/extension aide is sometimes misperceived as an administrative assistant position, which it does subsume to a large degree, but there is an abundance of additional roles



Jerrie Haines with her husband, Steve, hunting for the perfect Christmas tree.

and responsibilities. This includes some communications tasks, such as day-to-day management of social media and the *IPM News and Events Roundup* weekly e-mail newsletter.

“I think I worked the hardest to get up to speed on the *Roundup*,” Jerrie says. “I had never managed

a publication before, and I could tell from shadowing the production process for a little while after I started that it’s a significant undertaking that can require a lot of time. However, with practice and repetition, one gets into a certain rhythm and becomes more efficient at the process while also finding ways to put their own stamp on it.”

From New to the Team to Part of the Team

While navigating the expected challenges that come with any new position, Jerrie is settling in and has proven herself to be a valuable—and valued—colleague. And she’s pleased to have earned this opportunity to take her career back to its roots while incorporating what she’s learned along the way.

“The Center did well to find Jerrie Haines. I’m confident I speak for everybody by saying we’re beyond pleased to have her on the team.”

— Deborah G. Grantham, director, Northeastern IPM Center

“I enjoyed my greenhouse work, and the experience broadened my perspective, but it was mostly manual labor and I often felt underutilized,” she says. “Now, I’m back to using my brain full-time at work. It has given me new ways to feel I can really make a difference.”

Joining the Center has allowed Jerrie to evolve her career, but as with any member of such a small team, her presence has also helped shape the Center itself. “As I keep growing in my career, I always want to be an important part of whatever team I am working with. I’m motivated by being needed and by stepping up and filling those needs,” she says.

“Nancy Cusumano’s departure left big shoes to fill, but I firmly believe the Center did well to find Jerrie Haines,” said Deborah G. Grantham, Center director. “Her interests, skills, and experience make her a natural fit, and I’m confident I speak for everybody by saying we’re beyond pleased to have her on the team.”

Please join us in warmly welcoming Jerrie Haines to the Northeastern IPM Center, thanking her for her contributions so far, and wishing her continued fulfillment as part of the team. ■

Deter Deer from Devouring Your Landscape

By Marcia Anderson, PhD, LTE
U.S. EPA-Center for Integrated Pest Management

Last year, before I could muster the energy to plant my flowering perennials, I made the mistake of temporarily leaving them outside. An hour later, I was faced with the harsh reality that my plants' flowers, buds, and leaves had been bitten off.

The culprits were not very sneaky. I later found a doe and her fawn eating my impatiens, geraniums, and other potted annuals. Sound familiar?

Springtime is the perfect opportunity for deer to gorge on high-protein, moisture-rich plants—especially nursing fawns and underweight adults. An adult deer can eat up to ten pounds of greenery a day.

So, how can a gardener keep deer from eating their landscape?

Before I planted my flowering perennials, I made the mistake of temporarily leaving them outside. I later found a doe and her fawn eating my impatiens, geraniums, and other potted annuals.

Implementing an integrated pest management (IPM) approach to managing deer is beneficial to both human health and the environment. This approach is considered smart, sensible, and sustainable because it focuses on preventive—rather than reactive—control steps. IPM also emphasizes the least hazardous physical, cultural, and chemical tactics.

By grounding IPM decisions in biological information about deer (e.g., their preferred food sources), it is possible to implement strategies that require minimum-to-no pesticide use.

Fencing

An effective method for deer exclusion is installing and maintaining a deer fence. However, in many communities, zoning regulations do not permit fencing taller than six feet, an effortless jump for a white-tailed deer.

To manage this problem, install parallel fences within a few feet of each other. This approach is referred to as “double fencing” and inhibits deer from jumping because they cannot see the landing area. Also, installing fences with irregular tops creates an optical illusion.

But recognize that each deer is unique and persistent. A fence that deters one deer won't always deter another.

Visual and Olfactory Barriers

The fence at my house is only five feet high, hardly an obstacle for a determined deer. However, it is back-planted with deer-resistant shrubs such as boxwood, *chamaecyparis* (false cypress), *andromeda*, holly, and weigela. These shrubs act as a deterrent because they obstruct a deer's view and confuse its sense of smell. Pungent



Two fawns stop by for a visit. Photo by Alan Light, [flic.kr/p/55xbj2](https://www.flickr.com/photos/55xbj2/).

plants such as garlic, chives, mint, lavender, lemon balm, bee balm, and oleander can mask the scent of desirable plants.

Consider avoiding the desirable plants in the first place. Deer are very attracted to impatiens, sunflowers, tulips, hostas, daylily and daisy varieties, yews, arborvitae, and hyacinth. Try replacing these plants with varieties that deer do not enjoy, such as daffodils, lily of the valley, lamb's ears, lavender, Russian sage, *liriope*, *pachysandra*, and myrtle. Deer also do not like ornamental grasses, iris, foxglove, or yucca.

But if you are not willing to replace the beautiful sunflowers, tulips, or daisies in your garden, no need to fret! I happen to really like daisies, so I still plant them, but I also plant marigolds, lupine, and sage around them. Deer *especially* detest the scent of marigolds and avoid lupine as it makes them sick.



Lamb's ears in bloom—a plant that deer detest. Photo by Dustin Murrell, [flic.kr/p/CGeq7j](https://www.flickr.com/photos/CGeq7j/).

Some shrubs act as a deterrent because they obstruct a deer's view and confuse its sense of smell.

You can learn more about deer-resistant plants—including those that will work in your hardiness zone and with your yard's sun and soil types—by consulting your state or local government's department of natural resources website, or a master gardener or landscape professional in your area.

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Deer

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Chemical and Physical Repellents

There are many effective commercially available deer repellents. However, chemical methods typically require maintenance (i.e., reapplication after each time it rains). Also, it's prudent to alternate the types of repellents you use so that deer do not become acclimated.

Before you apply any chemical-based deer repellent, read the product label directions, and check your state regulations to see if it must be applied by a licensed applicator in accordance with other restrictions.

Other repellent products include sewage sludge fertilizer or sewage-derived mulch products. If you use these products in or near a vegetable garden, be cautious of their potential heavy metal content (Belhaj et al., 2016).

Even when using the more creative deterrent strategies—such as aluminum pie plates, streamers, lights, soap, or coyote urine—remember that deer acclimate to most distractions. Always alternate your repellent strategies for best results.

For More Information

These tips should help you naturally deter deer and keep the fruits of your labor—your garden and your landscape—intact.

For more information from professionals in this field, view EPA's webinar on integrated deer management at youtu.be/wsCfaHX1EZo.

Reference

Belhaj, D., N. Elloumi, B. Jerbi, M. Zouari, F.B. Abdallah, H. Ayadi, and M. Kallel. 2016. Effects of sewage sludge fertilizer on heavy metal accumulation and consequent responses of sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*). *Environmental science and pollution research international*, 23(20), 20168–20177. doi.org/10.1007/s11356-016-7193-0

Credits

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