December Employee of the Month

Winner: Kevin McGraw
Nominator: David Cutter

Although Kevin is in his first year as Grounds landscape manager, he rapidly grew into his new responsibilities and sought creative opportunities to enhance the stewardship of the campus landscape. A prime example of his initiative was his critical role in planning and implementing the Tree Campus USA ceremony and planting event this fall. When Cornell was notified that we were one of 10 college campuses funded by Toyota and the Arbor Day Foundation for a fall tree planting event, we had barely a month to organize a campus-wide, student volunteer implemented planting of over 75 trees. Because of the preparation and staging work his Grounds team had undertaken, the student volunteers had the satisfaction of making a significant and sustainable contribution to the university campus all in less than two hours.

In this period of shrinking budget and staff within Grounds, Kevin exhibited great resourcefulness in working with his colleagues within Cornell and the landscape industry. Although the funding source only allowed for up to 50 trees to be planted on campus, Kevin worked with local suppliers and other programs within Cornell to secure more than 75 trees to be planted by this initiative, exceeding the Arbor Day Foundation’s expectations by 150%. In order to ensure a high ratio of landscape professionals to students at the dispersed planting sites, he organized core teams from the Grounds crews, and convinced Cayuga Landscape to volunteer a crew to adopt one of the planting sites.

Kevin has also played an important role in the implementation of numerous naturalization initiatives identified in the Advancing Sustainability Action Plan (ASAP). One of these initiatives was recently recognized by the City of Ithaca and the Rotary Club of Ithaca by awarding their “Pride-in-Ownership” award to Cornell for our efforts in re-naturalizing a portion of Libe Slope.