

### APS Potomac Distinguished Service Award 2023

The 2023 recipient of the Potomac Division of the American Phytopathological Society distinguished service award is a Pennsylvania native who holds an A.A.S. from Paul Smiths College which was followed by a B.S. in Forest Ecosystem Services from University of Maine. They also obtained their M.S. in Forestry from the University of Maine studying beech bark disease. Our awardee then earned a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology from Penn State University with a dissertation on research focused on using *Verticillium nonalfalfae* as a biological control of the invasive tree *Ailanthus altissima*.

Our award recipient then moved to Virginia Tech to work as a research associate to study thousand cankers disease of black walnut and an entomopathogenic fungi as potential BCAs of hemlock wooly adelgid. Finding their true love of the division, they moved to Morgantown, WV to join the Plant Pathology faculty at West Virginia University in 2014. Since 2017, they have served as Interim Director, International Culture Collection of (Vesicular) Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi (INVAM) until it is fully transitions to the University of Kansas in 2024.

While still a forest pathologist at heart, the recipient has discovered a range of mycological associated research projects to include fungal-arthropod interactions from ambrosia beetle to cicada-killing fungal entomopathogens that result in “flying salt shakers of death”, with research being featured on podcasts, written media, and television news channels. The recipient is a National Geographic Explorer, working with a team of researchers across the country to study fungal feeding millipedes and their ecosystems roles.

The recipient has had a viral twitter presence, featuring experiments on fungal infected marshmallow peeps and mummified twinkies. Beyond science communication for a wide audience, the recipient bravely discussed *Finding mental-health clarity under pandemic pressures* with Nature and assured us that *The Last of Us* is only a video game turned TV show, so we should worry less about Cordyceps and more about Cocci.

Our award recipient has been heavily involved with the American Phytopathological Society being recognized as a graduate student through multiple APS awards. The award recipient has been involved with our Potomac division since graduate school and served as the division Secretary/Treasurer in 2017, Vice President in 2018, and President in 2019; has served as an associate editor for Phytopathology; and serves on the divisional council. The award recipient routinely encourages excellent student participation at the meetings and has served as the local arrangements chair. We wish them luck being the 2024 local arrangements co-chair.

Beyond their scientific works, the recipient openly shares their time and communication skills along with their infectious enthusiasm. While well known for studying fungi they can often be found hiking through the forest with their family and Newfoundland.

Given the outstanding commitment to research and scientific communication, service to APS, and continued commitment to the Potomac Division, **it is an honor and pleasure to announce**

**that Matt Kasson has been selected as the 2023 APS Potomac Division Distinguished Service Award recipient.**