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Delaware Center for Horticulture Celebrates Graduates of the Branches to Chances® Return to Work Program

(Wilmington, DE) – The Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH), a local non-profit organization dedicated to improving the community through the power of plants, celebrated the graduation of seven Branches to Chances® participants on Thursday April 27, 2023. The ceremony began with an overview of the Branches to Chances® program, followed by opening remarks from County Executive Matt Meyer, New Castle County Government on the successful program. Inspirational keynote speaker, Saad Soliman, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs and Criminal Justice at Patient Sortal addressed the gathering and the ceremony then concluded with reflections from each Branches to Chances® participant about their experience throughout the program and the presentation of program certificates.

"We're honored to work with each of the 2023 participants and watch their growth throughout the course," said Sarah Bett, DCH Education Manager. "This program is an important step for individuals looking to return to the workforce and pursue a career in the horticulture industry. With a balance of classroom, hands-on lessons, and field trips, the Branches to Chances® program provides an engaging learning environment to explore topics ranging from the basics of plant anatomy to landscaping techniques that have an environmental impact."

Branches to Chances® is a 9-week program designed to introduce participants to the horticulture industry through horticultural and life skills training. The program combines classroom based sessions, hands-on skills development, field trips, and character-building experiences supervised by industry experts. The curriculum covers botany, horticulture, plant culture and maintenance, water management, equipment use, and safety. Classroom learning is further reinforced by working within the DCH public landscapes, gardens, and grounds to experience how to identify plants, install plants, mulch, weed, water, and prune.

In addition to education in horticulture, Branches to Chances® provides work-life-skill training in financial and computer literacy, preparing for a job interview, developing workplace skills, and

exploring topics about personal wellness. Trainees also participate in a week-long externship with an industry partner to gain additional experience and exposure to job opportunities within the landscape industry. The Branches to Chances® workforce development program has been successful in connecting participants with entry-level positions in the horticultural industry. Job placement includes positions in landscaping, tree maintenance, and park maintenance, as well as the retention of graduates to continue their workforce development training caring for DCH's public landscapes and gardens.

This Spring's Branches to Chances program also serves as applicable training for the 2023 Delaware River Climate Corps (DRCC) initiative. The DRCC is led and supported by the William Penn Foundation and The Corps Network to enhance climate resiliency and strengthen green career pathways through expanding Corps programming within the Delaware River Watershed.

Recruitment for the 2024 Branches to Chances® Class will begin in December 2023. Please contact Bonnie Swan (bswan@thedch.org) and Robert Harris (rharris@thedch.org) for more information.

The Branches to Chances® program is supported by a variety of partners including ABHA Architects, Acme Store #808, Bancroft Construction, Bank of America, Capital One, City of Wilmington, The Corps Network/The William Penn Foundation, Corteva Agriscience, Delaware Criminal Justice Council, Delaware State Parks/Brandywine Zoo, Discover, Harry's Hospitality Group/Kid Shelleen's, Jewish Family Services, Kentmere Rehabilitation and Healthcare, The Laffey McHugh Foundation, New Castle County, Pettinaro Management, LLC, Williams Houck & Co., LLC, Wilmington Trust, T.D. Bank, The WSFS CARES Foundation, and individual donors.

About Delaware Center for Horticulture

Since 1977, the Delaware Center for Horticulture has inspired individuals and communities through the power of plants. Its work includes creating and maintaining the first Urban Farm in the city of Wilmington, establishing the Branches to Chances® Return to Work Program, beautifying public landscapes, planting and advising on the urban placement of trees, and hosting educational programs and community events. For more information, visit www.thedch.org.

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Pictured: 2023 Branches to Chances® graduates at the Delaware Center for Horticulture joined by County Executive Matt Meyer, New Castle County Government, Vikram Krishnamurthy, Executive Director, DCH, Sarah Bett, Bonnie Swan, Robert Harris, and Saad Soliman, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs and Criminal Justice at Patient Sortal.