The University of Georgia Griffin's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences 28th Annual Classified Staff Awards ceremony was held on March 11 in the Stuckey Conference Center Auditorium. Eight employees were honored this year.

During the ceremony, those employees who had meritorious service of 10 years or more were also recognized, as well as new hires and retirees.

Ellis Moncrief, a horticulturalist working in the college's blueberry breeding program, presented the research highlight focus for this year.

Mark Banta, president and CEO of the Piedmont Park Conservancy, was the guest speaker.

Following Banta’s keynote address, the 2015 Employees of the Year were announced. They were Sharon Dowdy, Office of Communications and Creative Services; Donna Smith, Finance and Administration; Bill Sandefur, Facilities Management Division; and Donna Kent, Plant Genetic Resources Conservation Unit; LaMont Sudduth, Horticulture; and Clay Bennett, Crop and Soil Sciences.

Classified Staff Employees of the Year nominees are (front row, from left) Robbie Beck, Field Research Services; David Mann, Center for Food Safety; Sharon Dowdy, Office of Communications and Creative Services; Donna Smith, Finance and Administration; Bill Sandefur, Facilities Management Division; Donna Kent, Plant Genetic Resources Conservation Unit; LaMont Sudduth, Horticulture; and Clay Bennett, Crop and Soil Sciences.

A special award was also given to Ken Morrow, president of Sod Atlanta, in absentia as a representative of the Georgia turfgrass industry. Morrow and these professionals were recognized for their successful efforts in helping to procure legislative funding for the University of Georgia’s turfgrass research programs.

A total of $11.5 million has been designated to improve turfgrass teaching, research and extension services at the Athens, Tifton and Griffin campuses. Out of that total, $9.5 million is slated for the Griffin turfgrass program.

Classified Staff Employees of the Year are, from left, Donna Smith, Bill Sandefur and Sharon Dowdy.