

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Valleybrook Sells Ontario Location

Chris Beytes

John Schroeder, founder and owner of Valleybrook Gardens in Ontario and British Columbia, Canada, has sold his Niagara-on-the-Lake location (he's keeping Abbotsford, BC, his original location).

Valleybrook Gardens, which produces perennials and groundcovers, is known for its blue pots and its tagline, "The best perennials come out of the blue."

The buyer? Brookdale Treeland Nurseries Ltd. (BTN), a family-owned nursery headquartered in Ontario. Formed in 1983 by a merger of Brookdale Kingsway Nurseries and Treeland Wholesale Nursery, BTN has 700 acres in Ontario (at three locations), New Brunswick and British Columbia. They produce everything from annuals to shade and fruit trees. And Christmas greens is 40% of their business.

BTN will retain the name Valleybrook Gardens Ontario and will continue to produce and sell Valleybrook's brands under license, including Heritage Perennials, Jeepers Creepers, Colour Craze and Garden Gladiators.

Why buy Valleybrook? We asked second-generation owner Jeff Olsen that question.

"We love the business," Jeff answered. "It's a very well-run organization. The brand is solid, unbelievable quality product ... from the facilities through the team through the product through the customer base, everything just said 'buy me.'"

As for why John is selling, "In the immortal words of Kenny Rogers, 'You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em'" he said via email.

"When I started the nursery back in 1988, it was with the expectation I would grow it and sell it, perhaps in 10 years. But then I hired Phil Goodfellow, and later his wife Brenda, and they kept growing the business, so I thought, 'Why sell?'"

John says he first decided to try to sell the business in the late 2000s, which coincided with the 2008 financial crisis and several years of poor industry and company performance.

“Now we’ve enjoyed some excellent years,” John says. “Sales are growing, an excellent team is in place, so there couldn’t be a better time.”

Not knowing BTN, we asked John if he was worried about entrusting his brand’s reputation with them. He said absolutely not.

“One of the most satisfying aspects of this deal is seeing how much BTN valued our business, our brands and our reputation. They are determined to carry on building on our exceptional reputation for quality and service, and thus are maintaining Valleybrook Ontario as a stand-alone business. There are no changes planned to staff or management, and they are committed to maintaining quality by allowing our team to continue doing what they do so well.”

That team includes Rich Tomlinson, General Manager; Jason Rekker, Nursery Manager; Tracy McAllister, Senior Manager of Sales; and Kim Corey, Senior Manager of operations, who manage the business with the help of “quite a few additional amazing staff.”

As for Valleybrook’s original location in Abbotsford, John said it’s not time to fold ‘em just yet.

“When I do, my goal is to follow the template of this deal: passing on a going concern with reputation, employees, brands and happy customers intact.” **GT**