

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

7/26/2013

### Retail Race

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*Photography by Chris Beytes*



Joe Lutey of Wojo's Greenhouse in Ortonville, Michigan, selects the perfect lime-colored pot, which helped him go on to create one of the winning displays during the annual Garden Center Live! Merchandising Contest at OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio in July.

The sense of friendly competition is part of what makes our industry unique, and what has driven, for the last five years, the Garden Center Live! Merchandising Contest during Short

Course. Fans of The Food Network will note the contest's concept has an "Iron Chef" or "Chopped" ring to it: Contestants are pitted against each other to create an inspiring and shoppable retail display based on a theme using "mystery ingredients"—in this case, plants, hardgoods, benching and whatchamacallits unknown to them prior to the start of the competition.

This year's Merchandising Contest saw two separate competitions. The first had two pairs of teammates working to create a display around the theme "Can You Dig It?" That is, does your display have the tools your customers need to use the livegoods you sell to them? Pairing staff to create displays is as reality-TV as it gets. Jessica Schaefer and Adam Duncan of A & J Landscape in Sylvania, Ohio, walked away with the win over Emma Stidham and Jeff Wallitsch of Wallitsch Garden Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

The second contest was based on the theme "PINspired!", or offering your customers the pots and crafts they need to make garden projects they might spot on a social media site. Joe Lutey (pictured), took the prize over Richard Gibson of Soleil Garden Center in Union City, Tennessee.

Creating these displays with random plants and products is something that all garden center employees encounter, which is what makes them compelling to those passing by the contests at the show. What's a little sharing of ideas among friends, right? **GT**