

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Fire at Dan Schantz Destroys Production Barn, Cooler

Chris Beytes

“Well, things are okay. We’re slowly starting cleanup and getting plans together to start rebuilding.”

This is what John Carl, part owner of Dan Schantz Farm and Greenhouses in Zionsville, Pennsylvania, said just 36 hours after a fire leveled their entire production barn and bulb cooler, along with a section of greenhouses. He sounded amazingly upbeat for a guy who was only a day and a half into dealing with a major fire—in fact, the first the business has ever experienced.

John laughed. “I think we either have to cry or ...” Then he said, more seriously, “It was very disheartening the night of the fire. It’s really devastating ... It’s going to take a lot of hard work from a lot of people just to get things done in what would normally have been a busy season.”

The fire broke out the evening of January 3, sometime between 8:00 and 8:30, John says. A neighbor spotted it first and notified president and part owner Patrick Flanley, who lives on the property. The fire department responded quickly, with more than 100 firefighters from 20-plus companies battling the blaze, which started in the production area. John said it destroyed all of their planting equipment, soil room, stored plastics, their big bulb cooler, forklifts, tow motors and some offices, resulting in a “total loss” of their production and shipping area.

But John, looking on the bright side, said, “The good news is, the fire company was very proactive; we were able to get a fire line set up that prevented any damage really to most of our greenhouses.” They did lose about 16 bays that were adjacent to the production area, but otherwise, the rest of the facility was spared. The big loss was the production area and equipment, the cooler and the spring bulbs (hyacinths, tulips, daffodils) that were in it (their Easter lilies are already out in the greenhouse).

Two days later, they were in the process of getting everything cleaned up, with the fire inspector and insurance company on site to figure out what sparked the fire. He says they’re already putting together plans for rebuilding. With having a clean slate, they can build their new production barn just the way they always wanted it.

“That’s what we were thinking,” he replied. “The good news is, we can correct some of the things we didn’t find out the first time.” He added with a chuckle that they called the destroyed building the “new headhouse,” even though it was 26 years old.

John noted that they’re fortunate to have other locations in Pennsylvania and Maryland. He also took time to express his gratitude to the firefighters, the local community, and customers and fellow growers, who’ve been very supportive.

“That’s helped tremendously. Just the phone calls and emails from people asking, ‘Is there anything we can do? Just know that we’re here for you.’ That’s been a big, big help.

“We don’t realize sometimes ... we’re always, you know, trying to cut each other’s throats for a penny, but we are a community, and everybody does seem to pull together when there’s something like this.” **GT**