

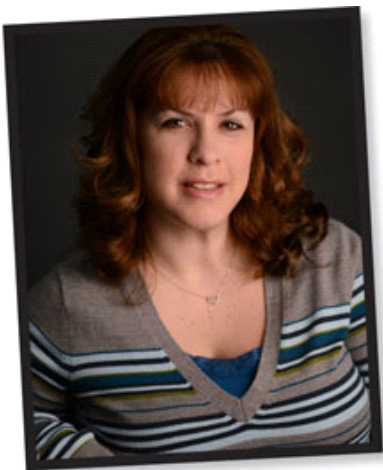
GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Many Firsts

Jennifer Zurko



JENNIFER ZURKO

All of us know the feeling of starting a new job (unless you've been doing the same thing and been at the same company your whole life).

So most of us are familiar with the second-guessing (Am I making the right decision?), the nervousness (Will I be successful here?) and the excitement (A new opportunity!).

This year's *GrowerTalks*/Dümmen Orange Young Grower Award winner, Jill Mullaney, was Greenhouse Manager at the Dallas Arboretum. I say was because right after Cultivate'17 when we announced she was the winner, she emailed to tell me she was leaving the arboretum.

There were some new "firsts" with this year's Young Grower Award.

Jill was the first nominee and finalist from a botanic garden. For the 13 years we've given out this award, it was an unspoken policy that the nominees should be from a wholesale greenhouse operation. When Chris, Jen, Ellen and I combed through the nominations and we came upon Jill's, we initially said, "Oh, she's from a botanic garden," assuming that we automatically put this one in the "no" pile.

But once we started reading what Susan Morgan said about Jill, explaining why she should be considered for the award, we realized that what she did at the arboretum was what many young growers do. Ordering and production planning? Check. Growing thousands of plants in a greenhouse? Check. Implementing new processes and worked to improve current ones? Yup. Jill did all of that. The only difference is she worked for a non-profit. Many of you work on a shoe-string budget; her budget was an even thinner string on a baby shoe.

The second "first" was finding out that our new winner was switching jobs in the middle of trying to coordinate a photo shoot and an interview. We know some past winners who've been able to use the award as an added feather in their cap to move up in their company or take advantage of new opportunities—but that's usually well after the September issue is collecting dust on the shelf. Hearing about it while we were planning this issue was an interesting first.

But it really wasn't a big deal and it helps that Jill isn't leaving the industry (after speaking with her, I think she's here for life). She's trading sweltering summers spent planting in the Texas sun to a comfortably air-conditioned desk job doing marketing and consulting at Halleck Horticultural.

It's completely different from what she's doing, and when I interviewed Jill for the cover story, her excitement for this new venture was evident. As you read the story, you'll learn that she's not afraid to take on new challenges in order to expand on her knowledge. She's a person who's truly hungry to learn as much as she can, while also maintaining her creativity. Jill really knows herself—how many of us can actually say that?

While you're in the middle of this issue, make sure you read our Cultivate'17 coverage. Most likely, you were there along with everyone else in the industry, but we may have found some things you missed.

We've also got tons of articles for plug and liner production in this issue, so make sure you keep them handy for spring propagation time. It'll be here before you know it. **GT**