

GROWERTALKS

Under an Acre

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Withstanding the Test of Time

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Nestled in the quaint oceanside town of Winthrop, Massachusetts, just a stone's throw away from Boston, is Tewksbury Greenhouses—a family garden center that's existed for more than a century. Today, the business is proudly run by the fifth-generation owner, Ashley Barisano, whose passion and dedication honors the legacy of the past while responding to the needs of future gardeners.

Pictured: Charles Tewksbury started the business with his wife Henrietta in 1870.

The Tewksburys have been a part of the Winthrop community since the early 1700s. The property on Bowden Street, which would eventually become the site of the family business, was purchased in 1870. It was here that the family began to nurture their passion for growing, including building a glass conservatory to house a variety of plants and fruits. Their neighbors loved seeing these unique offerings and began asking the

Tewksburys if they were for sale. Recognizing a need in their community, Charles and Henrietta Tewksbury, Ashley's great-grandparents, decided to build a greenhouse and began selling plants to their neighbors.

Little did Charles and Henrietta know with that first greenhouse they were creating a family legacy. Over a century later, the Tewksbury family continues to grow plants in that same glass greenhouse. Although some aspects have had to be replaced, the foundation of the building was maintained, including using glass housing and hand cranks to open the windows.

Walking through the store is akin to taking a stroll through history. Pictures of the past are placed throughout the garden center, sharing the story of the five-generation journey. It's this story that continues to draw individuals both from the local community and the surrounding states to the store each spring.

"Word of mouth of the business travels and we often see people from different states coming in for the plants and the story," shared Ashley.

However, it's the exceptional customer service, attention to detail and the family's unwavering commitment to produce the highest quality plants that's allowed the business to withstand the test of time.

"Our family is committed to the tried-and-true techniques, including hand watering, which helps maintain the quality

of our plants,” said Ashley.

One member whose stories Ashley continually hears is that of her grandmother, Marguerite. She was the face of the business for decades, hiring the neighborhood children to assist with watering and different side jobs throughout the store.



“People come in today and tell me stories about their experiences working with my grandmother,” said Ashley.

Ashley’s parents, Charles and Deborah, took over the business in 1993 after Marguerite had passed away. Seven years later (in 2000), they decided to add a second greenhouse to the location and convert the potting shed into a gift shop area.

Pictured: First- and second-generation Tewksburys Henrietta, Richard and Marguerite.

As a child, Ashley never envisioned taking over the family business; however, when her family began discussing retirement in 2012, she took a leap of faith and returned home.

“My dad was going to try to sell the greenhouses,” said Ashley. “I said absolutely not. With all the family history, I wanted to give it at least a try.”

Her diploma in art and design was a natural complement to her new career path, creating a space that included display pieces and containers that could be found nowhere else in North America. In fact, one of her hobbies is antiquing, where she discovers new pieces for displays and innovative containers.

“I use drawers from dressers, old colanders, chairs and all different things,” said Ashley. “Most of them I plant and put up for sale, but some I use to create a nice setting and showcase the history of our family-owned greenhouse.”

Although, Ashley admits that the learning curve was steep, she’s extremely thankful that she hasn’t had to do it on her own. Her parents and husband, Richard, have been extremely supportive throughout the journey, providing information and a helping hand whenever needed. Today, the two greenhouses house between 50 to 70 varieties of plants in the spring and then they reopen their doors each fall for customized planters, fall décor and plants.



“It’s too hot to grow the fall plants,” Ashley said. “But everything we sell in the spring we grow and once we are sold out, we are sold out.”

In addition to the standard offerings, Ashley is making a name for herself through her customized containers, which she shares both in-store and online.

“I take the time to create different containers, window boxes and displays,” she said. “However, it’s sharing my knowledge with the customers that is truly rewarding.”

Pictured: Current owner Ashley Barisano’s parents Charlie and Deborah.

Social media has become an integral part of Tewksbury Greenhouses communication strategy, including making regular posts on both Facebook and Instagram.

Now, seven years into her garden center journey, Ashley shared that it’s been an honor to be a part of this business

and be able to continue to bring plants and a piece of history into people's homes.

"People come in with multiple generations and share their stories about how they grew up with the store," she said. "It has become a family tradition where the families return each spring. We are really blessed to have these regulars support us generation after generation."

Her son Brayden, who's now 3, will be the sixth generation if he takes over the business. Today, he's content, toddling beside Ashley, chatting with customers and bringing flowers to their cars.

"One day, I hope that Brayden will look back, see those pictures and see how he is a part of his family's history," said Ashley. **GT**

Anne-Marie Hardie is a freelance writer/speaker from Barrie, Ontario, and part of the third generation of the family-owned garden center/wholesale business Bradford Greenhouses in Barrie/Bradford, Ontario.