GROWERTALKS

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Take This Job … and Promote It!

Chris Beytes



Seed Your Future (seedyourfuture.org), the horticulture industry movement focused on inspiring people to pursue careers working with plants, held its first "Green Career Week" this month, October 3 to 7, with the goal of encouraging companies (like yours) to educate high school kids about the many fun, exciting and potentially lucrative career opportunities in horticulture.

I hear you chuckling. Fun? Lucrative? But remember, we were all once impressionable young high school kids without a clue in the world about how we were going to make a living, and look at us now, enjoying excellent careers in horticulture!

I love the idea of showing kids what we do for a living, and Seed Your Future tried to make it easy by providing resources to help you organize class tours or give presentations to students and so on.

Personally, I don't think we should wait until kids are in high school. You want to make an impression on a kid, get 'em early! I'm surprised I'm not a baker or chef because one of my fondest early memories is of making peanut butter cookies at age 5. I can still remember how it felt to press the fork into the top to make that classic crosshatch pattern. I'm sure you've got your own early fond memory of something … perhaps involving gardening.

As for Green Career Week, you probably didn't participate, perhaps because you didn't hear about it in time or you thought it would take too much effort (note: you can do it any time!). But let me offer a bit of encouragement about participating next time around. It comes from a guy named Chris DiStefano, whom I saw on national cable news this week.

Chris is owner and COO of Harrison & Burrowes Bridge Constructors, a New York construction firm that's gone viral for doing something simple: loudly and publicly offering high school seniors a no-college-required, debt-free career, with full benefits, in the construction industry. All they have to do is graduate and complete a summer internship to get put on full time building bridges.

Said Mr. DiStefano, "College isn't for everybody—and with the rising cost of tuition, we can provide a great opportunity for those folks that the path to college might not be the best path for them."

Obviously, this comes on the heels of the executive decision by the President to pay off a portion of some college

loan debts, bringing to the fore the high cost of college tuition. Now, professors!—I am NOT knocking a college diploma. I've got one and I'm glad I do, as I needed it to get my foot in the door at *GrowerTalks*. And another construction company owner, Mark Johnson of Degraff Bloom Custom Builders in Round Lake, New York, is an engineer who tells his apprentices that if they want to eventually go to college, "go to college with a purpose." But not everybody is cut out for a college education or a white-collar desk job; and the reality is you can forge a lucrative green industry career without college.

My point is that the national news media picked up Mr. DiStefano's offer of good-paying jobs ($35/hour for laborers, although I don't know how they do that—maybe it's a union thing) that don't require college and the associated debt, and I don't see why we, too, can't go public with OUR no-college, no-debt career opportunities.

I mean, come on—we are MUCH sexier than bridges. Plants and gardening have been top of mind among the public. Food security and cannabis make the news every day. We're on trend, we're desirable, we're essential. This is what Seed Your Future is trying to do with their Green Career Week, and I think everyone should jump on board and support their efforts to bring some much-needed publicity to the job and career opportunities we offer. I just gave you proof that the media is willing to pick up our story.

Granted, we may not be able to offer $35 an hour to start. But when compared to bridge-building, there's less risk of being skewered by a 40-ft. stick of #5 rebar! **GT**