

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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75 Years of Unique Plants

Chris Beytes

Happy 75th anniversary to the folks at Ted's Greenhouse in Tinley Park, Illinois, in Chicago's south suburbs, a retail-grower well-known by Chicagoland's retailers, landscapers and gardeners for the interesting, oddball and unusual. Pictured (left to right) are Ted's son and second-generation owner Dan Biernacki; Dan's wife, Karen; and some of their key employees, including Greg Stack, a veteran of the University of Illinois Extension and their main scheduling, seminars and tours guy; Nick Hampton, office manager and Karen's right-hand man; and Cesar Herrera, greenhouse manager and head grower. "He's like five people" said Dan of the amount of work veteran employee Greg gets done.

Ted, the founder and company namesake, passed away in 2021 at the age of 90. He grew up on the family's truck farm in Blue Island, Illinois.

Dan said of his dad, "He hated growing things for people that they needed [like produce] because they didn't want to pay for it."

So he tested some flowering plants, such as field-grown, overwintered pansies—which he found customers would pay for. He eventually bought 10 acres in nearby Tinley Park, built his first greenhouses and started into flowers full-time—cuts, pots, annuals, herbs, cacti and succulents—anything customers wanted.

Dan grew up in the business, of course. When Karen and Dan started dating in 1985, she quickly learned that if she married Dan, she'd be marrying the greenhouse business, too. Dan, wanting to improve upon the business his father had built, attended Ball's DuPage Horticulture School, graduating in the final class in 1988.

As for the third generation? Dan and Karen say their two grown daughters, Jessica and Rebecca, aren't interested in the day-to-day running of the business. But years of working in the greenhouse did get into their blood—both are now running vocational agriculture programs for Illinois high schools, preparing the next generation for green careers.

With no kids wanting to take over at this point, Dan and Karen are considering other avenues of transition, such as employee owned/operated or the possibility of new owners—whatever will keep it "growing" for another 75 years.

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