

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Skagit Gardens to Close

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Skagit Horticulture LLC announced in February that it would be discontinuing operations April 7, 2024. According to the official “Notice of Closing” press release “current economic issues including market pressures, production cost, energy cost, freight cost and the business climate in the State of Washington have all contributed to this decision.”

The closure also includes their Skagit Gardens and Northwest Horticulture brands.

The explanation covers a lot of ground, basically everything every business faces, including yours. Business is tough these days, and if you don't have family involved, with a next generation that's hungry and ready for the battles ahead, well ... sometimes closing is the wisest thing, especially if there's real estate value involved.

Skagit Horticulture did start out as a family operation, Skagit Gardens, founded by Jim and Ruth Youngsman in 1966, growing Mother's Day mums in a single 20 ft. by 150 ft. greenhouse. They grew the business to more than 20 acres over the next 20 years. But it ceased being a family business in 1998, when the Youngsman's sold to International Garden Products (IGP)—remember, that was back when many greenhouses and nurseries were looking very attractive to investors.

However, IGP declared bankruptcy two years later and sold Skagit to venture capital firm Aequitas Capital Management. That didn't end well, with Skagit in debt and Aequitas being sued for fraud. Skagit had to file for bankruptcy in 2016, which was when Northwest Horticulture purchased them. And if you really want to go back into history, Northwest Horticulture was formed out of the old Summersun Nursery & Greenhouse owned by Carl Loeb, which eventually was renamed Etera—you may recall they were doing perennial liners grown in the ground with special bottomless pots? (Thanks to Seattle Times reporter Paul Roberts for helping with the history.)

Stepping into the vacuum

The loss of Skagit has hit the northwest horticulture community pretty hard, in large part because they have been an important young plant supplier to the region. Little Prince of Oregon's Mark Leichty sent a letter to customers stating that the staff is “shocked and saddened” to hear of the closing.

Wrote Mark, “I've been in contact with management staff at Skagit over the past couple days to offer support during this difficult time and to inquire how Little Prince can be of assistance to them. I was impressed that their main concern was not for themselves, but for you, the Independent Garden Centers who are now wondering where you're going to get plants for the upcoming season.”

Mark continued, “It is our intention to do everything we can at Little Prince to increase production to help fill the void left by the loss of Skagit Horticulture. I've also spoken with Ian Herrera at T & L Nursery so that our two companies

can coordinate and support each other as we move forward. We've always valued the relationships we have with all the great wholesale nurseries in the Pacific Northwest. Together, we'll all do our part to mitigate the production gap, both now and in the future." **GT**