GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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When Life Gives You Lemons … Build a New Greenhouse!

Jennifer Zurko



Late spring of last year, a fire broke out during the shopping hours at Wallace's Garden Center in Bettendorf, Iowa. I say "shopping hours" because if it had been at night, there would have been a lot more damage. The fact that it was during the day and that it was in the back production greenhouses meant that Owner Kate Terrell and the Wallace's team could evacuate their customers and staff safely so that first responders could get to work.

Some crops suffered smoke damage, but the primary losses were to their hardgoods supplies, including their soil mixer, pot filler, sprayer, conveyor, pots, tags and pallets of fertilizer. With the help of fire inspectors and Wallace's insurance company, they opened the garden center five days later. But the real work had just begun.

Now, less than a year later, Wallace's brand-new Prospiant greenhouses were getting their finishing touches when I was there for a visit in early March. The fire was a major setback, to be sure, but it presented an opportunity for Kate to upgrade her production facilities and really strategize what the needs were.



The new 10,500 sq. ft. greenhouse will have more room for storing pots and tags, and with a continuous concrete floor it will be easier for the staff to move carts and product seamlessly from the production area to the retail space. They also installed a water-by-weight basket system and better climate controls so that employees are comfortable no matter the weather. Kate's even thinking about holding some workshops in the new greenhouse throughout the year.

The fire was a major speedbump, but the new facilities offer Wallace's even more opportunities to take care of their staff and service their customers.

"It's just really going to be an improvement on everything," said Kate. "The area that burned was actually the last area of this greenhouse business that had never been remodeled, had never been touched. And so, as painful as it's been and as heartbreaking as it is to see a fire, to rebuild it into something this awesome is truly rewarding, no matter how long the process." **GT**