GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Happy Anniversary, Emerald Coast!

Chris Beytes

A very happy 35th anniversary to Florida grass, perennial and succulent liner specialist Emerald Coast Growers. The Pensacola, Florida, business was founded in January 1991 by Dave and Wyona Babikow, who moved to Florida from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with their two sons, Mark and Paul.

Dave has a long family history in growing, dating back to 1875 in Baltimore, where his grandfather had a nursery. In Pennsylvania, Dave worked for Green Leaf Enterprises, owned by his brother, Buzz, but he was also growing ornamental grasses in his backyard. The family decided to branch out and start their own nursery, and they chose the panhandle of Florida, a decision that's not quite as crazy as it sounds. It's mild enough for a long growing season (Zone 8b) but gets cool enough in the winter for a good dormancy period. And it's near major highways.

Over that 35-year period, Emerald Coast has grown from just a few hoophouses to three locations (they added Milton, Florida, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania), with 570,000 sq. ft. of greenhouses and 85 acres of farmland. And they've expanded from just grasses to include perennials and succulents.

Dave and his wife retired in 2013; today, the fourth generation is keeping the Babikow family tradition alive! **GT**