Cultivate Highlights; PW Leaves Spring Trials; Tree Town to Rebrand



BE IN THE KNOW
Timely news and commentary from GrowerTalks
YouTube
GROWERTALKS MAGAZINE

FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2019

subscribe





GrowerTalks' Acres Online

News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Cultivate news, views
PW says so long to CAST
Tree Town USA to rebrand
Young Grower, Young Retailer
AI camera and two cool robots
Finally ...





Cultivate news and views









I'm not complaining, mind you, but when I used to attend the Ohio Short Course much earlier in my career, I could get a lot done on the trade show floor because nobody knew me and I didn't know them, and I could walk the show several times and sniff out all the cool new stuff. Now, what with appointments and meetings and aisle conversations with old friends, I have to scramble to see half the show.

But the half I saw was amazing!

Actually, I exaggerate—I did manage to get around the show floor on my quest for greenhouse tools and technology (while Jen Polanz, Jen Zurko and Allison Westbrook looked for everything else). But it took some doing, as the show was packed much of Sunday and Monday, and all the major and minor players seemed to be in attendance. It was as upbeat and busy as any of my previous 25 "Ohios." I haven't heard any attendance figures, but that's okay: the right people were there according to the exhibitors I talked to, and they say they were writing business.



I only attended one educational session (and only because I was the moderator), but it was almost full, with 80 or so folks in attendance, and I was told all the other sessions were well-attended, too. Certainly, there was no shortage of information on the hot topics of the day, from immigration to automation.

The networking opportunities were world-class, too. The show ran from 9:30 to 6 Sunday and 9 to 5 Monday (9-2 Tuesday), but the conversations started early and lasted way past bedtime. Columbus has really come of age in the past decade, with the "Short North" area north of the convention center going from seedy wasteland to vibrant hipster hub, with new hotels and loads of good restaurants. And Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream, of course, where you can always find discerning flower people satisfying their sweet tooth.

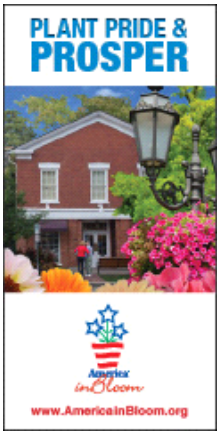
If you didn't make it, all I can say is, "Why not?" All of us—whether business owner, manager or employee— benefit from regular doses of information and inspiration in order to stay engaged and relevant. Mark your calendars NOW for Cultivate'20, July 11-14.



Proven Winners says so long to Spring Trials







The biggest news I heard at Cultivate was that Proven Winners has decided to drop out of the California Spring Trials.

Why? Several reasons, according to company spokeswoman Jeanine Standard, including declining attendance and the cost of growing, hosting and staffing such a major event. But most importantly, Proven Winners feels that there are better ways to reach their target audiences (distributor sales reps, growers and retailers) using print, video and social media tools that are much more available and affordable today than they were in 1997 when John Rader hosted the first Proven Winners trial at EuroAmerican Propagators.

I remember that trial—we were introduced to Million Bells, the first calibrachoa series, and Temari Verbena, which joined Tapien. Ah, such memories!

Now the question is, how will other exhibitors react to the news? Will they view it like, "Hey, if PW can manage without doing Trials, maybe we can, too!" Or will they think, "One less competitor means folks can spend more time at our place!" One distribution company representative told me he still needs to educate his sales force on the new Proven Winners varieties, so PW will have to deliver with these new tools.

And from my perspective, Ellen and I will have to figure out how to bring you the latest PW varieties when we can't include them in our *Acres of buZZ!* daily Spring Trials coverage and Bobblehead videos.

Plus, I admit I'll miss the nice wine lunch at Kirigin Cellars Winery. Perhaps somebody wants to take over that lovely spot? …



A rebranding for Tree Town USA

I ran into Tree Town USA owner Jonathan Saperstein and Executive VP David Kirby in the Agrinomix stand, where we were all watching a new robot assiduously spacing nursery pots (more on that below). I couldn't help but notice an "Under Construction/Coming Soon" badge cleverly pinned over the embroidered logos of their three brands: Tree Town USA, Village Nurseries and Hines Growers. "What's that all about?" I asked.



Jonathan, CEO of the company that he took over from his father in 2014, told me they are working on combining the three divisions into one, and that all three company names will go away—even Tree Town USA. That surprised me, seeing how it was the company that acquired the other two.

But Jonathan explained, “Every company I’ve got has been a merger, not an acquisition.” Each has great people and a great culture, he said, and he didn’t want anyone to feel like a winner or loser in the company. In fact, their motto since the mergers has been “Growing Together as One.” That’s why they’ll be starting with a clean slate and an all-new name, with no remnants of the old brands to be found.

I pressed him for hints, but Jonathan remained mum. He wants staff to learn the new name (once it’s decided) from him, not from some journalist.

By the way, Jonathan was recognized by *Forbes* magazine in 2017 as one of their 30 Under 30 in the Manufacturing and Industry category. Here is a VIDEO they did about the business.



Young Grower, Young Retailer winners crowned

Congratulations to our Young Grower and Young Retailer winners and finalists, whom we crowned Monday night during AmericanHort’s Unplugged event.



Our *GrowerTalks*/Nexus Young Grower Award winner is John Terhesh of Willoway Nurseries, Avon, Ohio (third from left). To the right of John is our *Green Profit*/RBI Young Retailer Award winner Madison Williams of Boulevard Flower Gardens, South Chesterfield, Virginia. Watch for profiles of Madison and John on the covers of our September issues.

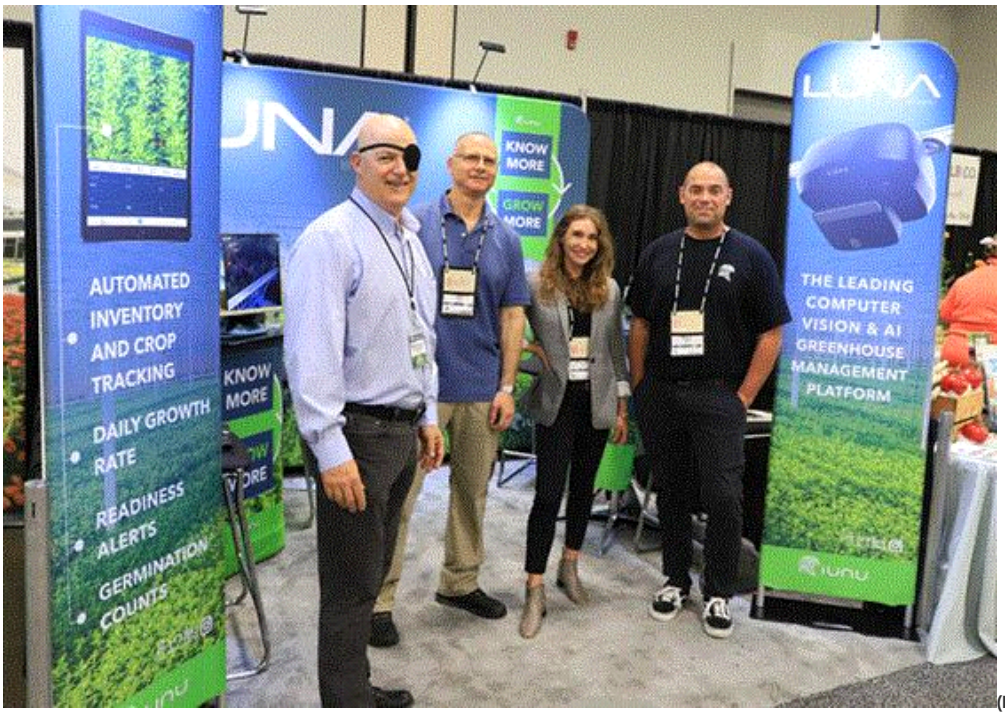
Our finalists are all forces to be reckoned with, too. They are (L-R) Tonya Diehl, Brian Austin, Morgan Huston and Tanner Jones. With all these smart, engaging young people loving horticulture, our industry is in good hands.



Tech from the tradeshow floor

Rest assured, we'll be doing full coverage of the Short Course … oops, Cultivate'19 trade show in our September issue. And Ellen, Paul Pilon and Jen Polanz will no doubt have selected news and products information in their newsletters. My beat is greenhouse technology, and I've got three new products that drew a lot of attention:

iUNU
Somebody asked me at Ohio if I'd seen anything featuring artificial intelligence, so it was ironic that just an hour or so later, I met the folks at iUNU (pronounced "you knew"; the I is silent). They say their greenhouse data-gathering device, called Luna, utilizes artificial intelligence to help you build a map of the location, growth rate and maturity of your crops. The company was founded by Adam Greenberg, who comes from a family orchid greenhouse background, so he knows first-hand what happens in a commercial greenhouse.



(L-R)

The iUNU crew: Robert Kendrick, Jeff Kahn, Madeleine White and Shane Lewis. They didn't have an actual Luna in the booth, but you can see a photo of it on the banner on the right.

Luna is a little device housing precision optics that rides suspended from a rail over the top of your crop, taking pictures regularly (once to several times a day). That data is combined with data from stationary cameras and various environmental and light sensors and sent to a computer, where it's all crunched into an analysis of the real-time growth rate of your crop(s). You can access the data however you prefer, from a spreadsheet to an iPhone app. Think of it as graphical tracking taken to a super high level, and tracking every plant in the greenhouse, not just a few.

Once you have a history of growth rate and all the accompanying environment data that influenced that growth rate, you can more accurately and efficiently produce your crops. You can use the technology on young plants or finished plants, and can even track plants as they flower, so you know the exact bloom percentage of a bench, bay or greenhouse for sales, inventory and shipping purposes. You can use the data to deploy labor, and even use it to keep an eye on your crops remotely.

Right now, Luna is being used mainly on leafy greens, but the developers say there's no reason it can't be used on any crop, edible or ornamental.

Pricing is via a monthly subscription model, and iUNU is very consultative in their sales and setup procedure to ensure your success with the system. Check it out at https://iunu.com.

Green Workforce's multi-purpose robot

"Robotics as a service." That's the tagline for Green Workforce and their interesting plant-handling robot.



Originally developed to harvest strawberries, this three-axis robot has been adapted to transplant small Ellepots into larger containers or trays. But now they're improving the technology to a more versatile six-axis system, to plant more shapes and sizes, stick unrooted cuttings, and trim plants. With the addition of a camera system it will be able to sort and grade, too. Said company president Victor Cesena, "Many more tasks are on the horizon, with new tools being added every few months. We look forward to reducing labor tasks across the growing spectrum."

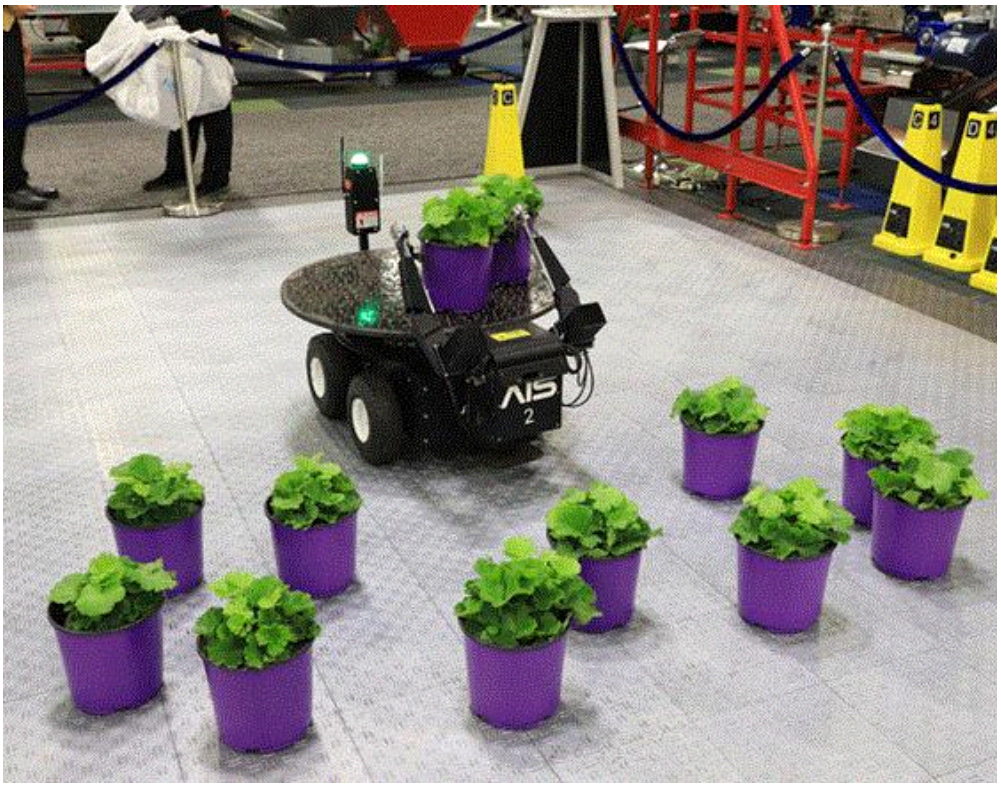
Interestingly, these robots are not for sale. That's because they get paid by the piece. That's right, Green Workforce will install your robots for free, and charge you a per-plant fee based upon what you currently pay per piece for the task. If it costs you 3 cents per plug to transplant it, you'll pay Green Workforce 3 cents per plug planted. Simple!

One fun factoid: The small robot is called SKIP (Simple tasK Implementation Platform). They are developing one that will work in a much larger space (100 meters x 100 meters) they will call LARS (Large Area Robotic System). The choice of these acronyms wasn't an accident, says Victor; they honor Skip Blackmore and Blackmore's National Sales Manager Lars Peter Jensen for their partnership.

Here's a quick VIDEO of it in action.

AIS's Big Top robot

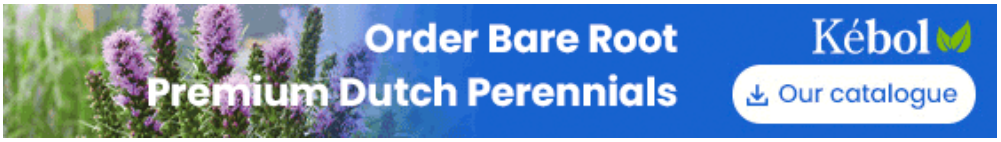
The AgriNomix booth, once home to the HP100 "Harvey" robot, was again featuring the newest in nursery automation. "Big Top," from Advanced Intelligence Systems (AIS) of Vancouver, British Columbia, is a motorized, rubber-tired plant-spacing robot. Like Harvey, it's designed to pick up, move and put down pots. Unlike Harvey, which moves just one at a time, Big Top can move up to nine pots at once, up to 22 lbs. each. It's guided by electronic cones you place at the four corners of the work area. You program it via tablet. Power comes from a pair of rechargeable batteries.



Also unlike Harvey, Big Top is modular. The base provides power, wheels and brain; the carrier and manipulation components can be changed out for various functions, such as pruning (which was on display, but not operating). They say they've got six more versions on the drawing board.

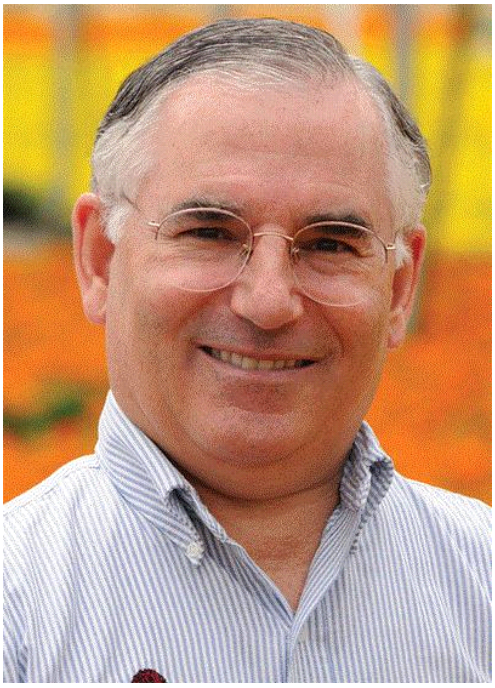
Similar to Green Workforce, AIS will hook you up with a Big Top on a piecework basis (plus a small licensing fee). I was told that it costs 8 to 12 cents for a human worker to move a plant; AIS will charge you just 5 cents for each pot moved by their robot. And, of course, being a robot, Big Top counts extremely accurately.

I must say, the little guy is endearing to watch in action. He reminds me of Disney Pixar's Wall-E. See for yourself in my VIDEO.



Finally ...

It's flattering to get accolades from one's competition.





Bill Swanekamp's family business, Kube-Pak, of Allentown, New Jersey, was named Operation of the Year at *Greenhouse Grower's* Medal of Excellence awards program, held during Cultivate. Kube-Pak was also recognized with the award for Excellence in Business Management. Perhaps that's why Bill has been one of our "Growers Talk Business" columnists since 2007.

And **Roger McGaughey** of Pioneer Gardens in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was presented with the Excellence in Integrated Pest Management award for his cutting-edge work with biological controls. Roger has written for our "Growers Talk Production" column since 2006, after I heard him use the U.K. colloquialism "hose pipe" at a talk in New England. I told him that if he could write as interestingly as he talks, he'd be a favorite columnist, and it certainly has worked out that way.

Congratulations, Bill and Roger, for being recognized at Cultivate this year and for your long service to the industry through your *GrowerTalks* columns. We've always appreciated your excellence.











See you next time,



Chris Beytes
Editor
GrowerTalks and *Green Profit*

This e-mail received by 23,670 loyal readers!

Thanks to my loyal sponsors, who help me reach the 23,670 readers of *Acres Online* in 66 countries. Want to be one of them (a sponsor, that is)? Give Paul Black a shout and he'll hook you up.

