

Rambo Closing; Ball Buys Must Have; Who's Lucanne?; At Dramm



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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2025

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- Rambo to close
- Also owned by Mr. Heaner
- Ball buys Must Have Perennials
- Must Have's Rare Life Plants
- Happy retirement, Ann and Mike!
- Lucanne gets Dümmer heliconia
- Room for more Rain Wands
- plus a research greenhouse
- and sustainability

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Georgia big-box grower Rambo Nursery, founded by Sam Rambo, but now owned by Andrew Heaner, will be closing this spring, according to a WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification) filing, which is required by law if you plan on laying off employees.

This WARN, dated January 29, states that "the management of Rambo 1 (aka the Company), is permanently closing its facilities and terminating the employment of its employees. The Company will be engaging in a mass layoff and termination of the employment of 135 employees effective beginning January 31, 2025. The Company will be permanently closing its facilities in Dallas, Georgia, and Cedartown, Georgia, in April or May 2025."

Along with detailing the layoffs, the filing alleges a cause: "These job actions were necessitated due to unforeseen business circumstances. In particular, the Company was in the process of seeking a transaction whereby the business would be sold in a manner that would allow the business to maintain operations. These discussions have not led to such a transaction."



Sad news for the business, which Sam founded in 1983 with one greenhouse producing annuals and perennials for local landscapers and retailers in his hometown of Marietta, Georgia. Sam grew it to a million square feet of greenhouse and 120 acres of outside production. He sold the business at the end of 2021 to the current owner, Andrew Heaner. However, there's a court case in Cobb County, Georgia, filed April 1, 2024, in which Sam claims that he hasn't been paid in full for the business.

No word yet on any bankruptcy proceedings or unsecured creditors who may be affected by the closing.

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Other businesses owned by Mr. Heaner

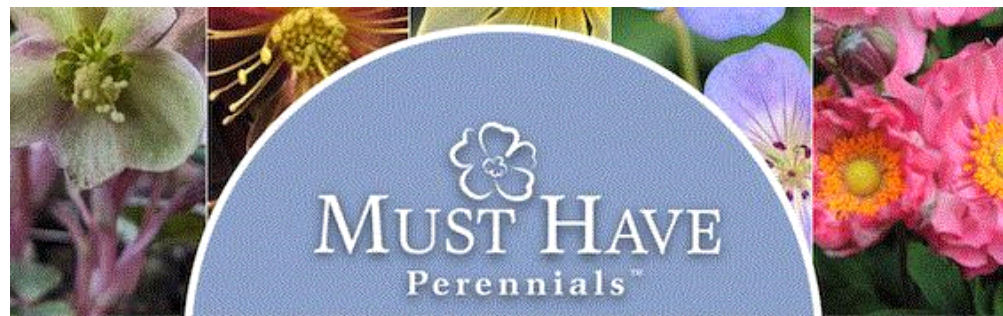
I am not familiar with Andrew C. Heaner, but in researching the court case mentioned above, I learned that Rambo is not the only business he owns. Far from it, in fact. Along with 11.68% of a Georgia banking network, he owns a car wash, an entertainment company, a laundry, rental properties, various property management companies, a motorcoach company, an aviation company, an escrow company, a finance company, an insurance company for the logging industry, and a clothing store, to name a few. I even found [THIS STORY](#) about he and his wife Mary Helen's 1,200-acre exotic and unique animal farm.

Perhaps he found the greenhouse business to be a bit more challenging than some of these other markets he serves.



Ball acquires Must Have Perennials

Continuing its investment in the still-hot perennials market, Ball Horticultural Company has just added [Must Have Perennials](#) to the lineup. It will join Darwin Perennials and Kieft Seed, Ball's other providers of perennials, and will be aligned as part of Ball's Outback Plants division, which, like Must Have, sources genetics from third-party breeders. Must Have represents the vegetative and tissue culture perennial genetics from dozens of breeders around the world.



Curious about the acquisition, I asked Jacco Kuipers, Director of Strategic Business Analysis, for details.

"Ball and Aris/Yoder Brothers have been in close partnership for years," he replied. "When we acquired the farm now called Darwin Colombia from Aris back in 2014, the farm already was the exclusive producer for the Must Have Perennials unrooted cutting assortment. We have continued to carry new and existing varieties at our Colombia farm, so there was a natural familiarity with the assortment, the team and the essence of Must Have Perennials. Furthermore, Must Have Perennials is a natural expansion of the breeder agency work our Outback Plants division does, which further strengthened our resolve of seeing Ball as a great steward of this business."

Ah! I'd forgotten that Ball had acquired its Colombia perennial farm from Aris. And I'd forgotten about Outback Plants, which, while not perennials per se, is a breeder agency like Must Have Perennials, so they know how that business operates. And I like what Jacco said about seeing Ball as a steward of the business—meaning the genetics from dozens of the world's best breeders (many of whom are very small).

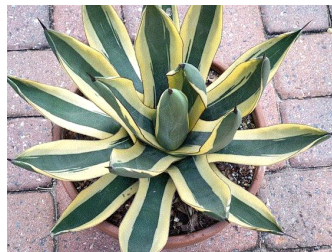
Taking a historical step back to 1995, you will recall that Must Have Perennials started out as Blooms of Bressingham, founded by Adrian Bloom and named for his family's Bressingham Gardens & Nursery in the UK. Blooms was acquired by Yoder Brothers, the company that morphed into Aris. Aris changed the name of the division to Must Have Perennials because the Blooms of Bressingham name was no longer being supported.

As part of the acquisition, Justin Wisniewski will join Ball as general manager/product manager for Must Have Perennials, a job he's been doing for five years.



What's new for Must Have? Rare Life Plants

Looking ahead for Must Have Perennials, they announced recently their latest brand—**Rare Life Plants**. It's focused on plant material that's been part of the conservation efforts of Tony Avent and Juniper Level Botanical Garden (JLBG). Must Have Perennials will be launching genetics from the breeding efforts of Tony. With a long-term goal of supporting the JLBG Foundation and its mission, Rare Life Plants will use royalties collected to help support this endeavor and further partnerships with North Carolina State University.



Great White Shark



Simply Divine



Purple Reign

Rare Life is a collection of agave, amsonia, baptisia, epimedium, hosta, lycoris and sorghastrum. Varieties in the collection include Agave Great White Shark, Baptisia Purple Reign, Epimedium Spring Sunrise, Hosta Simply Divine, Lycoris Sunray and Sorghastrum Slim Pickens, to name a few.



Happy retirement, Ann and Mike!

Talk about a big industry vacuum to fill ... long-time horticultural consultant Ann Chase and her business partner and husband, Mike Zemke, have retired as of December 31, 2024. Together, they ran Chase Horticultural Research, which they rebranded in 2011 to Chase Agricultural Consulting when they relocated from California to Arizona.



A couple truly outstanding in their field!

Ann is a world-recognized plant pathologist focused on research, diagnostics and practical consulting plant pathology for ornamental crops. She's been widely published and has spoken at every major and minor industry event. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California at Riverside in 1979, after which she joined the University of Florida's Mid-Florida Research and Education Center in Apopka. She retired from there in 1994, but remains on staff as a Professor Emeritus.

Mike holds an Associate of Applied Science in manufacturing drafting. He says he started his education in horticulture when he and Ann were married in 1995. He specializes in communications of all sorts within the industry.

Said Mike in his email to us with the announcement, "It has been rewarding and challenging, and the best part was after you've helped someone to see the smile on their face."

So what are their plans now? With no more consulting, writing, speaking and growing of plant trials, how will they spend their time? Doing some RV traveling, along with various home and yard projects, said Mike.

In other words, the shoemakers can now tend to their own footwear!



Lucanne continues Dümme heliconia breeding program

I suspect this headline might make you ask, "Who?" And also, "Does Dümme had a heliconia breeding program?"

I'll give you one more to ponder: "Lucanne B.V. owner Perry Wismans signed an agreement with Dümme Orange that assigns and transfers all rights, titles and interests related to the Dümme Orange heliconia breeding program to Lucanne B.V."

Now you're saying, "Hold on a second. Isn't Perry Wismans an owner or manager or something with Dümme? Now I'm really confused."

As was I. But a quick email to Perry, who sent me the original press release, cleared it right up.

Perry—who has officially departed Dümme Orange, but still serves on their Advisory Board—started Lucanne in 2018 in his hometown of Haalderen, the Netherlands, as a consultancy from which he billed fees to Dümme and some other smaller projects. The name celebrates his son, Lucas, and daughter Anne-Fleur—which also gives us the pronunciation: "Luke-Anne."

As for the heliconias, they arrived at Dümme about 10 years ago when the company bought anthurium breeder Rijnplant. Dümme kept the breeding program going on the heliconias, but never brought them to market.

"I monitored the program over the years and always liked it," said Perry, "Today, it doesn't fit Dümme Orange's portfolio after the sale of orchids and anthurium."

He added that the heliconias weren't included in Dümme's recent sale of Rijnplant, which is what made them available to him.



“Personally, I think this program offers lots of opportunities, as it has been improved for over 10 years and has, as far as I can see, great potential that is ready to be unlocked!” said Perry.



Lucanne (continued) and some pictures

The breeding focus will remain on compact growth, early flowering and improved performance under cooler conditions—traits that will make them accessible and versatile for growers and gardeners alike. Tosca Ferber, Chief Technology Officer at Dümme Orange, is pleased to see her breeding direction continue under Lucanne’s operations.

“We have more than 10 years of breeding efforts in this crop and it’s rewarding to see this effort continue,” she said. “I have no doubt that this product has a fantastic future under Perry’s commercial leadership.”



Perry said that tissue culture starter material is available both for commercial introductions and experimental varieties. He hopes to launch his company and his heliconia line at Cultivate'25.

Want to know more? Email Perry at p.wismans@lucanne.com.

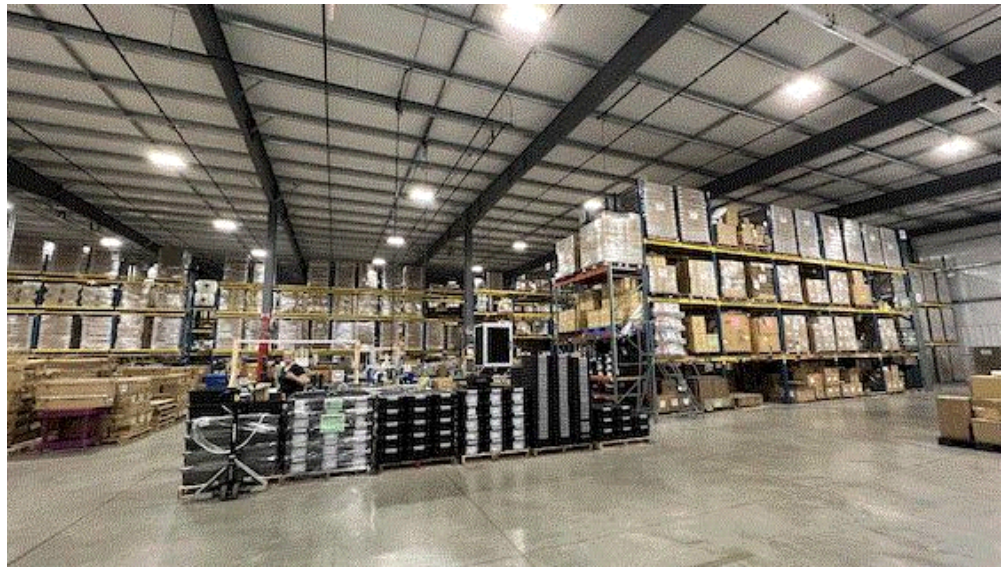
Oh, if you happen to see the name "Dutch Drifter" come up in the future, don't be alarmed. It's yet another of Perry's companies and he said he may use that one as the U.S. distributor for the product.



Making room for more Rain Wands

Last week, Publisher Paul Black, Video Producer Osvaldo Cuevas and Editor Jen Zurko jumped into a company car and drove three hours north from Chicago to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, to call on our friends at Dramm Corporation and see their new digs. Here's Jen's story (for their YouTube video tour, click [HERE](#)):

About three years ago, Dramm completed the construction of a brand-new facility after they outgrew their original location on the other side of town. After looking at other properties in the area, they decided on a 16-acre lot in a business park next to a pond and restoration area. It offered Dramm a chance to build their new facility from scratch and leaves some room for future expansion, too.



Along with 14,000 sq. ft. of office space, Dramm now has 84,000 sq. ft. of warehouse and factory space in which to assemble, package and ship all of their water-focused products—from their popular Rain Wands and irrigation tools to water testing and sanitation equipment. They even produce organic liquid fertilizer made from processed fish scraps and kelp.



Dramm also has a water-proof testing lab where they measure durability and shelf life for different products. For instance, when we stopped by, they were in the process of testing the run time of their lawn sprinklers and gauging how many times you can turn water valves on and off before they stop working.

Rainwands ... and a greenhouse, too

When we were there, they were just completing construction of a new R&D greenhouse, and they were preparing for some irrigation testing projects that they'll be conducting with young and finished plants this spring. They'll also be growing their own plants to put in the landscape and containers around the property.



Kurt Becker, head of U.S. and international sales for Dramm, said that they've been utilizing greenhouse space at a few local growers to test their products, but having their own R&D greenhouse gives them more flexibility. And before, they used to have their products spread out over three different warehouses in Manitowoc. Having to send multiple trucks to different locations every day wasn't the most efficient way to manage inventory.

With a spacious new warehouse, Dramm has also been able to invest in automation and equipment to make some of their employees' everyday tasks easier. For instance, a new vacuum lift helps the shipping staff move large boxes around and stack pallets much better—no more bending and lifting.

Dramm and sustainability (continued)

The timing of the new facility was ideal, too. Just in Rain Wands alone, Dramm produces over 750,000 a year and January 2024 was the biggest shipping month in the company's 80-plus-year history. Now, they have the space to handle any level of supply and demand.



“This new facility really gives us the space to test our products for all of the different markets we serve,” said Kurt. “And we’ve been able to think about everything we didn’t have the space for.”

Another factor that played a large role during the construction of the new facility—and is an ongoing corporate initiative for Dramm—is sustainability. Materials of the building frame contain up to 74% recycled contents, and the building itself can be completely disassembled and recycled at the end of its life. The carpeting throughout the office was made from recycled fibers and can be recycled after its use. And outside, there are six vehicle charging stations and an array of 286 solar panels that provide Dramm with about 90% of their energy needs.

“The whole idea was to be as environmentally friendly as we can,” said Heidi Dramm-Becker, Kurt’s wife and the daughter of Kurt Dramm, the founder of the company, who passed away in 2023.

Finally ...



Congratulations to Brooke Rollins, who was just named the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. I'm not sure how much influence she'll have on our specialty hort world, but let's hope and trust she appreciates the value of ornamental plants!

A farm girl from Texas, active in both FFA and 4-H, Secretary Rollins graduated cum laude from Texas A&M in 1994 with a degree in agricultural development. She was the first woman elected student body president, so her political aspirations were pretty clear. She then earned a law

degree from the University of Texas, graduating with honors. She's served in various legal and advisory capacities for Texas Governor Rick Perry and she oversaw the White House Office of American Innovation during President Trump's first term. She was confirmed for her new position by a vote of 72-28. Oh, and she's only the second woman to be Secretary of Agriculture; Ann Veneman of California was the first.

Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!



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