

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Let's Do This!

Gary Mangum



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Recent events in Baltimore have reminded us that there remain real differences in education and the idea of personal responsibility in some of our most densely populated urban environments.

Baltimore city schools cost more per pupil than any other system in Maryland, yet graduation rates and test scores are among the lowest in the state. Governor Larry Hogan, and a now famous mother, are being praised in local news as two individuals that did the right thing to end the craziness.

Governor Hogan took an active role in the aftermath, walking the streets, talking to individuals, police and business owners, and encouraging concerned citizens to take back the streets and show pride in their

communities.

His leadership motivated and empowered many community leaders to help with clean-up and improve attitudes. People from all parts of the state streamed into the city with food, water, brooms and more, and teamed up with local citizens to help others, regardless of race, nationality or religion. This unity display was made possible by our governor's confidence and call for help as he promised a safe environment for volunteers, while a strong, yet respectful, showing of police officers from around the state and National Guard, helped immediately change the tone.

As the governor was making decisions to improve public safety, an everyday urban mom was seen on TV "disciplining" her 16-year-old for throwing rocks at police. This mom was not shy about her decision to engage with her son and in her own way empowered hundreds of other parents to take a more aggressive role with their own children.

What does any of this have to do with our greenhouse operation? The answer could easily be nothing, had we never become involved with The Home Depot. We've learned many things working together—possibly the most significant is the importance of community involvement and truly giving back. Over the years our employees have teamed up with The Home Depot Foundation to build playgrounds for children and homes

for veterans on both coasts. We've seen first hand the positive impact of those projects, but it's not the same as getting personally involved. As business owners, we should take, even make, the opportunities to give more to the communities we serve.

Well before the April riots, Bell teamed up with the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives to build community gardens in some of the toughest parts of Baltimore, including ground zero for the recent troubles. We're working with the team at BIGGYS Community Center, whose mission we embrace: "Because Intensive Giving Gets You Started." (We hosted a job fair at BIGGYS in March and hired about 20 people who are now working in the garden centers we serve, distribution center and as drivers. We're proud to help get them started or restarted in a career!) BIGGYS serves everyone, from kids to seniors, and this summer we're teaming up to share the value of gardening with a community that may not otherwise get to participate in planting, maintaining and harvesting healthy food and flowers. This garden will expose youngsters to the rewards of planting, while requiring their participation to keep out the weeds and make sure it's watered. Bell volunteers will work with the kids to set up a produce stand and learn business basics—lessons we hope will impact them for a lifetime.

Every business in our industry has people who are passionate about what we do, so there's never a shortage of volunteers to assist. Many members of Team Purple have been enthusiastically involved in BIGGYS and other outreach programs we've put in place this year. They cheerfully donate their time and remain invested long after the delivery trucks depart.

We could assume that a greenhouse business has nothing to do with what happens in Baltimore, but as part of the community we serve, it's incumbent on us to make positive contributions, and in the end, it's good business.

We have to reach out to the future gardeners of America in every way possible, whether it's online, on the ground or by putting roots into our towns and cities. We can all make a significant impact, even if it's a small impact. I encourage you to get out and find opportunities, whatever they may be, in your own community. In the words of Home Depot, "Let's do this!" **GT**

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