

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Staying Ahead

Jennifer Zurko



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I've said many times that being owned by a breeding and distribution company instead of a publishing company has its benefits.

Other than the scoops and news tidbits we're privy to before the rest of the trade (shhhh!), we get to participate in many of Ball's nice employee perks, which most times includes plant sales. Right before Christmas, there was a sale on the Kebol Touch of Wax amaryllis bulbs that Ball Seed has started to sell in North America. These ones were covered in silver, gold and red wax with white flocking for the holidays, and I bought six to give as Christmas gifts.

Before the sale, there were samples displayed in HR so that people could see what they looked like. It was amusing to see the reactions of amazement at these fancy new bulbs and how they flower without a drop of water.

It was amusing because, to me, they weren't new. I actually saw them four years ago when Kebol introduced Touch of Wax at the IPM Essen show in Germany. I was lucky enough to tag along with Bossman Beytes in 2015 to see IPM for myself and it's an experience that I highly recommend to every industry professional.

It's not just a place to see what's ahead in new products and upcoming retail trends—which there is a plethora—but there's also plenty to see in automation. Mr. Beytes goes to IPM every year and it's his job to search out the cool new greenhouse robots, and being a gearhead himself, he's happy to do so. You can learn about some of the latest machines to help you stay ahead of the labor shortage problem.

It pays to stay ahead of the game and this couldn't be truer when it comes to your greenhouse equipment—specifically heating, cooling, climate controls and energy curtains. Yours may be running fine, and still looks okay, so how will you know when it's time to upgrade? We asked four different suppliers to offer their advice.

The same goes for knowing the what, when and how of whether or not you're ready to expand and if taking out a loan from the bank is a good idea. And last spring, I visited Sandy McDougale and her daughter Mitzi Marker—owners of Sandy's Plants in Virginia—who stay ahead by making sure they always have those rare and unusual perennials that their customers have come to expect.

I hope you're able to stay ahead of whatever comes your way this spring—bad weather, disease or insect issues,

lack of labor—and that it brings you a successful season. Speaking of staying ahead, I have to start planning the April issue ... **GT**