

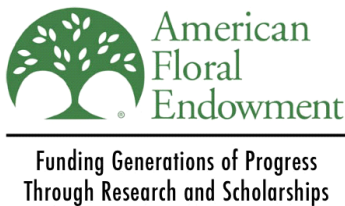
# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## 60 Years of Industry Success

*Julie Martens Forney*



If the last year taught us anything, it's that businesses that readily adapt to changing circumstances not only survive, they thrive. When external forces randomly reshape the marketplace, businesses positioned on the leading edge of change stand to grow and grab market share. It happened through many different industries in the last 18 months, with underdog business owners leapfrogging forward in their markets because they responded quickly to the issues of the day.

That kind of nimble business model is a secret for long-term success. Planning plays a part, of course, but being able to change directions, embrace technology and develop protocols as a result of new information is foundational to building a thriving organization. That's actually the secret to the American Floral Endowment's (AFE) 60-year success of supporting and serving the floral industry.

### **Responding to the times**

AFE can readily cite victories and research breakthroughs that have changed the way growers raise, treat and ship crops. Chances are, you're using the results of Endowment-funded research in your business—and you may not even know it. Concepts like DIF and graphical tracking for crop height control, using environmental modifications and biological controls to reduce Botrytis outbreaks, dipping unrooted cuttings to treat pests, and growing trap crops of marigolds as part of an IPM program for western flower thrips all came about as a result of AFE-funded research.

Producing quality crops for consumers has been a consistent theme and priority of Endowment-funded research for many years, including developing production and shipping guidelines and using anti-ethylene treatments for cut flowers, potted plants and bedding plants. When AFE-funded research helps reduce crop losses, profits increase. It's that simple.

What makes the Endowment so effective is its close partnership with growers, which enables the organization to discern and address industry concerns as they develop. AFE achieves this legacy of industry support because it actively asks growers—as well as other industry segments—about the issues and problems they're facing. That dialog informs research programs that, in turn, directly impact the way you grow, harvest, handle and ship crops.

For instance, four years ago the Endowment launched the Thrips and Botrytis Research Fund to raise \$1.5 million to support multiple research projects laser focused on these key pest and disease issues.

Sustainability is another vital area where research is currently ongoing. Reducing water, fertilizer and energy use fit

this category, as do research projects that develop biological control practices with crops. Best of all, the results of all funded research are available—free of charge—to every member of the industry. Just visit the Endowment website ([endowment.org](http://endowment.org)) and click on “Research.”

AFE’s research program is industry driven because it’s industry funded. It’s a partnership developed by industry members who understand the value of giving back to the industry to spur growth and development for generations to come. Growers and allied tradespeople invest in the Endowment’s programs to ensure future industry success. Industry-funded research benefits every grower when AFE is behind it.

Art VanWingerden, co-CEO of Metrolina Greenhouses, notes, “I have seen first-hand how resources and research from AFE can be used to help better inform employees and improve business practices. From the smallest operations to the largest, the knowledge shared from AFE’s research helps the entire industry provide better quality and longer-lasting product.”

### **Training top talent**

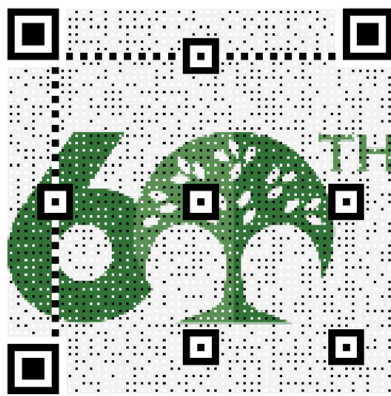
The Endowment’s 60-year legacy doesn’t stop with industry-funded research. AFE is also actively addressing the industry’s labor shortage through scholarship and internship programs. By annually funding over 30 university student scholarships and three separate internship programs, the Endowment helps train students in every area of floriculture: production, business and floral retail, wholesale, and allied trades.

Interns and scholarship recipients become a potential pipeline of future employees—the kind that already have hands-on experience. Art said Metrolina Greenhouses regularly hosts interns at their operation, referring to the experience as “the longest job interview.” Like many growers who participate in the program, he typically ends up wanting to hire the students.

Kathy McGinty, Human Resources Manager at North Creek Nurseries in Landenberg, Pennsylvania, also participates in the AFE internship program.

“Having had several interns, we have seen first-hand the exceptional results of a quality education combined with a first-class internship program,” she says. “We need more programs like this in our industry and we can’t thank AFE enough for getting the message out about the wonderful opportunities available.”

As a business owner, you can also take advantage of the Endowment’s Career Center ([afecareercenter.com](http://afecareercenter.com)) to locate and recruit top talent for your operation. Students visit the Center to search job listings and post their résumés. It’s a terrific tool for finding qualified job seekers who want to work in the floriculture industry.



### **Team up with AFE**

With a 60-year history, AFE has plenty to brag about, but this industry-supported organization isn’t ready to rest on its laurels. Instead, with a focus on the future, it’s looking to fund more research projects, develop more scholarship programs and connect with more growers to host even more interns.

That’s because AFE isn’t a membership organization, it’s an industry effort. It’s the kind of place where a single participant can make a significant impact for the industry because that one individual teams with others to make a difference. Investing in the industry’s future could be part of your legacy as you support and participate in the Endowment’s programs.

“AFE has been one of the keys to all aspects of the floral industry’s success for 60 years,” says Mike Mellano,

President of Mellano Operations in Oceanside, California. "Today, technology and consumer demands are growing at an ever-increasing rate, and AFE will surely be integral in helping the industry thrive as we move into the next 60 years." **GT**

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*Julie Martens Forney is a freelance writer with more than 25 years of experience writing about floriculture industry issues and gardening for consumers. To read her current bylines, check out SAF's Floral Management, HGTV.com and DIYNetwork.com. Julie's also an avid gardener, tending edibles and perennials in a wildlife-friendly garden that features year-round color.*