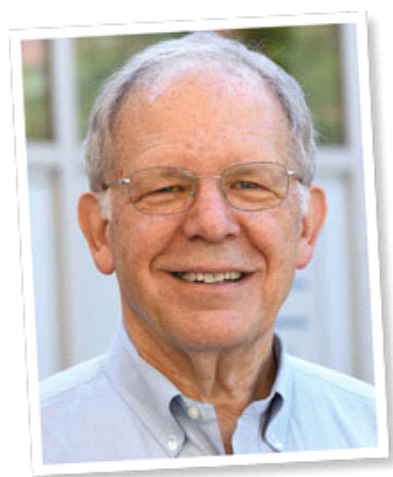


8/1/2020

Building Our Future Together

Bill McCurry



Bill McCurry

“We’re in this together!” That overused phrase has new meaning when interviewing your 2020 *Green Profit*/RBI Young Retailer Finalists. Each of them is a winner in their own right. While you’ll read more about the winner in the September issue, here are some perspectives from each of the finalists.

There are many common threads between them. Taking the COVID-19 pandemic as a challenge to build their teams has paid off. It’s been a period of growth for everyone, both personally and as a team. You’ll see why our industry is in such great hands with amazing successes coming from young retailers.

Kimberly Gliha Mullen—The Garden Barn Nursery and Landscape, Vernon, Connecticut

The Garden Barn leadership team includes seven active family members with an experienced staff of 10 qualified designers—a total team of 45.

Kim Gliha Mullen says, “Usually, in times of economic crisis, this industry is the first one to take a beating. Plants and gardens are often one of the first things people cut from their budgets because gardening isn’t ‘essential.’ In my wildest dreams I never thought a worldwide pandemic, combined with a global economic crisis, would send our industry into orbit. The most positive thing is the pandemic has made people understand how much enjoyment they can get from what we supply. We’re finally being recognized for providing what customers never knew they needed to stay physically and mentally balanced during uncertain times.”

Referring to this spring’s COVID-19 work environment, Kim reflects, “It’s been fun. As stressful and hard as it was, I never really thought about it until now because I didn’t have time. This year has taught me more about myself, my family and our team in such a positive way that I wouldn’t take back a minute. I’d do it again if I had to and if I knew I would come out with the same mentality as I have right now.

“It will and has already made us better. Now I see my true capability, that of my family and our team. I know, regardless of what happens, we would at least try and make it work. Whether or not we succeed almost doesn’t matter. We’ll give it our best efforts and everyone will work together. It’s shown me that we can make anything possible.”

Mickey Clickner—Tallahassee Nurseries, Tallahassee, Florida

Beyond building their team of co-workers, Mickey Clickner believes in building future gardeners. Exciting the younger generation so they love a garden also anchors their parents into continuing their children's commitment.

"Plants, gardening and the idea of growing catches on immediately," he says. "I love kids' fascination with new ideas."

Mickey runs a Little Gardeners Grow Club (except when lockdown is in force) with 100-plus kids in two different sessions on Saturdays.

"Our most popular event is the nursery scavenger hunt. The kids get a treasure hunt map. They find things all over and come back to plant a small succulent garden. I give them a little overview of the conditions it needs and how to grow things," he says. "We walk them through potting it up. The kids have a blast and their parents love it when they take home a miniature garden."

"We've done Camellia waxing or Paint the Pots and watched their enthusiasm grow. We give them an apron or T-shirt to take home. Everyone's happy."

"They're thrilled when we ask, 'Are you growing vegetables?' They're excited and love to talk about what they're growing. I think the future of gardening is definitely in good hands. There's going to be a whole generation growing up today with a stronger gardening commitment. The future's going to be great."

Lindsay Squires—Tagawa Gardens, Centennial, Colorado

John R. Childress, author of "Culture Rules," often related a lesson he learned from his father.

"Foxhole Buddies are friends you make for life as a result of a shared significant emotional experience." Pre-COVID-19, when a sudden loss of significant seasonal sales appeared likely, Lindsay Squires rallied the entire company to brainstorm solutions. It brought the team closer together sharing the experience.

Lindsay explains, "While finishing preparations for our October Family Pumpkin Festival, unexpected circumstances cancelled a key November event, which historically launches our holiday season. Standing amid pumpkins and cornstalks, we looked a few short weeks down the road and wondered, 'What do we do about November sales?'"

"Working quickly and creatively as a team, we pivoted from what we couldn't do and focused on what we could do. Together, we got the idea of a Winter Walk through at Tagawa Gardens. Featuring different points of interest throughout the greenhouse, we envisioned guests enjoying live music, sampling local cuisine, gathering inspiration from seasonal lifestyle vignettes and interacting with guest vendors."

"As a team, we created and owned the solution. We had no time to overthink it! We reached out to community partners, guest instructors, local vendors and area talent, but most of all, we relied on our team's talent. We shifted some of our displays, set live music in the middle of our Garden Supplies department and featured demos in areas that otherwise may have seen little traffic. We even created a community Christmas tree with ornament-making."

"Over three November weekends, Winter Walks proved to be the beginning of a promising new feature, segueing between the fall and holiday season. Because of a last-minute situation, we designed a collage of ideas we might not otherwise have had reason to create. Now, we look forward to growing our Winter Walks into an annual experience!"

Our industry has a bright future with the leadership thinking of these Young Retailers. They'll assure our bright future. Congratulations to each of them and to this year's many runners-up. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.