

Features

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A Bustling Garden Center in the Bayou

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I'd been to Perino's one other time a few years back when they were a stop during the All-America Selections Summer Summit in 2018. Needless to say they were memorable, so Dr. Jeb Fields (assistant professor and extension specialist at LSU, and editor-at-large of our *Nursery & Landscape Insider* newsletter), Michele Andre (Ball Seed) and I paid them a visit when I was back in town in April.

One of the owners, Peter Perino, spent time sitting and chatting with us and showing us around the garden center. It was BUSY for a Tuesday afternoon! Perino's is on a very busy main road, which is also off of Causeway Boulevard that's connected to Highway 10. And there was also construction going on. But the location works because they're in the middle of everything (stores, restaurants, etc.) and people were pulling in and out of the parking lot all day.

Pictured: Perino's Home & Garden Center is celebrating its 75th year in business, started in 1949 by Salvador "Sam" Perino (bottom left) and his wife Simica Pivach (far right).

Perino's is a grower-retailer, growing about 70% of what they sell at two different production facilities that total 38 acres with 350,000 sq. ft. of heated greenhouse space. And Peter said they're converting and adding another 30,000 sq. ft.

Peter and his brother and other co-owner Buddy are second-generation Perinos; their father Salvador "Sam" Perino started the business as a vegetable stand 75 years ago. And the good news is that the business will be carried out into the future—between the two of them they have FIVE daughters who are involved in the business, working in various roles. Emily is the office manager and working on establishing an e-commerce program. Catherine orders plant material and works with the growers to forecast sales. Megan is the gift shop buyer and manager along with Adele, who has a background in interior design, so she also works on merchandising, marketing and branding. And

Madeleine is on the plant side, working with the trees, shrubs and tropicals that they don't grow themselves.

They grow in all plant categories (including 40,000 poinsettias during the holidays), but have been adding more woody ornamentals to their inventory instead of bringing them in—the main reason due to the cost of freight.

“The only way to stay alive in this business is to do it yourself,” said Peter.

I asked Peter what people were filling their carts with this season and he said petunias are the biggest seller by far, even surpassing pansies. Vinca is also popular. And more people are buying SunPatians, especially because they last all season, even during the Louisiana heat and humidity. Any plant with white flowers is always popular in New Orleans. And what Peter refers to as “designer hydrangeas” in different flower and foliage colors are more in demand, too.

“It's an old plant that's getting new life,” he said.



Pictured: Peter Perino (far right) showing Ball Seed's Michele Andre and LSU professor Dr. Jeb Fields some SunPatians that have become very popular with their customers.

On the hardgoods side, they have an impressive indoor area for their furniture, giftware and apparel. Peter said that he's noticed the quality of outdoor furniture improving within the medium and high-end price ranges, which is probably why they're also seeing an uptick in sales. And they've just brought in new Grieve pottery from Italy in a variety of sizes in that dove gray color that's been popular. Their customers liked them so much that they sold through 50 pallets within a three-month period and had to order more.

Last year, Peter said they had a record year, and when I saw him in April, he said that this year was ticking up past that. It was a relief to hear because he said they were down 40% in January when southern Louisiana experienced an unexpected cold snap. They'd since made that up and then some.



"My father used to say our business was good during the Depression," said Peter. "The only thing that can kill your business is the rain. As long as the weather is nice, they'll come."

And come they do. Peter said they're definitely a destination garden center, but because they're surrounded by so much, parking has been a challenge for them. Still, people were filling their carts and trunks with plenty of plants. And Perino's staff was busy helping customers and answering their questions, which was nice to see.

"People do still want service, especially nowadays," said Peter.

It also helps that they're able to promote that they grow almost everything themselves—it serves those customers who put locally grown high on their list. Perino's has a long history, but the new generation coming in is ensuring that they keep up with the trends and keep their inventory fresh, from live goods to furniture.

Peter puts it simply: "If you don't change with the times, you get run over." **GP**

Pictured: The third generation of Perino's Home & Garden Center. From left to right: Emily, Adele, Megan, Madeleine and Catherine.