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In Memoriam: Phil Lukas

Chris Beytes

Full-service retail garden centers are less common in Florida than other states—I think because we have so many plants-only nurseries because of our mild weather. But what I'd term a true "garden center" in Florida you can count on a couple of hands.

Lukas Nursery in Oviedo, just northeast of Orlando, is one of those, and I'm saddened to report the passing of one of its third-generation patriarchs, Phil Lukas, who passed away March 28 at the too-young age of 73.

What's interesting about third-generation Phil, who was born in 1951, is that he didn't join the family business right away, possibly because at the time, the family business was not garden center retail, but truck farming—celery, potatoes, turnips, cucumber, beans, melons and more. Even eggs, as the next generation sought new ways to make money in agriculture. Instead, Phil became a car salesman in Leesburg, Florida, where he learned business and negotiating skills.

Meanwhile, his older brother, Paul Martin Jr., started growing and retailing plants in their old chicken coop. The business grew and prospered, becoming officially incorporated in 1976. Phil returned home the next year to join Paul, mother Gertrude and brother Stanley in the family business as vice president and general manager. His sales experience, knowledge and ingenuity helped grow Lukas to its current 33 acres. The business has been recognized by The Orlando Business Journal as a Top 100 Privately Held Companies in Central Florida. Phil and Stanley's children are now the fourth-generation operators. **GP**