

Features

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On the Road: A Garden Center That Feels Like Home

David Williams



I first visited Reynolds Garden Shop in 2011 while scouting locations for the Garden Centers of America NJ tour I helped organize. At the time, I was struck by how beautiful and forward-thinking the operation felt. I was also impressed by the unique flow that carried visitors effortlessly through their different departments. Some garden centers wear their age like a badge. Reynolds felt vibrant, modern, and full of potential. Today, more than a decade later, that energy hasn't faded. If anything, it's grown stronger.

The front walkway to Reynolds Garden Shop.

Back then, Reynolds was already impressive enough to be a featured stop on the GCA tour. Visiting again this year, the growth is undeniable. The business has expanded physically and philosophically, but it hasn't lost its roots. At its core, it continues to be a family-run business built on connection, quality and a shared sense of purpose.

Located in Manahawkin, New Jersey (Exit 63 off the Garden State Parkway for those who speak Jersey shorthand), Reynolds has evolved from a modest operation on a family-owned driving range into a multi-faceted retail village. The site now includes a full-scale garden center, floral design studio, home store, kids boutique, café, audio and lighting division, and even a home construction business. It's a retail footprint that stretches well beyond what most people think of as a garden center, blending lifestyle, design and horticulture into one seamless destination.



A Tight-knit culture

Peg Reynolds started the business in 1981 and now works alongside her husband Mark, their children, and their spouses. Their daughter Katie, now Katie Reynolds Hood, manages multiple retail departments including flowers, women's fashion, furniture and the café. Her husband Tanek leads The Shops' lighting and audio division. Their middle child, Ashley, is a teacher who works at Reynolds during school vacations and summers. Their son Luke joined the landscaping division during High School, continued through College, and now leads it, known for his instinctive

design and build work.

Inside the garden shop.

Mark continues to lead the construction side of the business, designing and building homes throughout the region. Luke's wife, also named Ashley, started as a part-time employee in her teens and now manages the children's boutique. Each family member plays a distinct role, from landscape and construction to merchandising and accounting. The next generation has clearly stepped into leadership, but what stands out is how collaboratively they work. Peg may joke about still being in charge, but the truth is the transition is happening seamlessly.



The staff culture is just as noteworthy. Everyone I interacted with during my visit was upbeat, helpful, and seemed genuinely happy to be there. That doesn't happen by accident. From day one, new hires are introduced to the expectation that kindness, flexibility and a team-first attitude are part of the job. Many staff members have been with the company for decades. During peak times, team members shift between departments. Baristas help at registers, and landscape crews unload plant deliveries. The model isn't rigid. It's responsive.

The café at Reynolds.

That flexibility is one of the business' greatest strengths. Staff are cross-trained, and departments are interconnected. It makes the operation more resilient and creates a sense of shared responsibility that you can feel as you walk the property.

Uniquely Designed

Reynolds doesn't look like a typical garden center either. The campus layout is a string of connected buildings, creating a walkable retail village. The arrangement happened organically, as opportunities to acquire neighboring properties came along. One great example is their kids section, which originally lived within another building. When customer interest continued to grow, they gave it a dedicated boutique space of its own. The result is a series of thoughtfully merchandised, highly distinctive spaces that all manage to feel like part of one story. The gift departments and boutiques are a key part of their business model, drawing customers well beyond the traditional plant shopper. The Reynolds team travels to the Atlanta Market several times a year to keep their selection fresh, relevant and aligned with national trends. The visual presentation is consistent and layered. From the moment you enter, it feels like a place meant to be explored.



A big part of the atmosphere comes from the music. Reynolds has integrated a Sonos system throughout the entire property, allowing staff to control volume through an app by zone. It keeps the music consistent with their brand, but the volume is tailored to the space. There's even a bit of friendly internal competition about who has the best playlist, though music choice is ultimately left to management. They also offer Sonos installation as part of their landscape and home services, a smart crossover between retail and design work that other garden centers might want to explore.

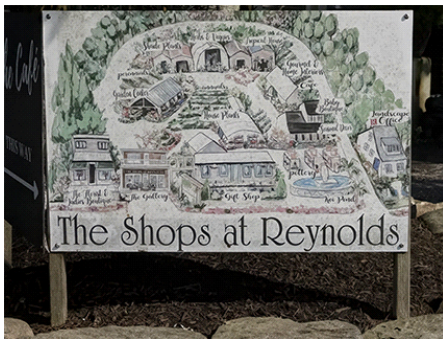
And then, of course, there are the plants. Every display, from annuals to perennials to shrubs and trees, was spotless. Not just good. Truly impeccable. At the end of the Christmas season, the entire store is reset and deep cleaned, ensuring every department starts the new year fresh and organized. The plant quality was some of the best I've seen, and it's clear there's an intentional process behind the scenes. John Kelly, the general manager and someone I've known for years, gave me a personal tour of the property during my visit. He keeps a close eye on every delivery,

and anything that doesn't meet their standard simply doesn't make it to the bench. It's a level of quality control that shows in every corner of the garden center.

Inside the home store building.

Their proximity to the Jersey Shore gives Reynolds a different seasonal rhythm than many other New Jersey retailers. While many garden centers start slowing down by June, Reynolds sees a second wave of business. As summer homeowners arrive and settle into their beach houses, Reynolds is ready with fresh products and new displays. They've timed their purchasing and growing cycles to match this late-season demand, giving them an extended window of opportunity and making them a critical destination well into the summer.

A Part of the Community



Another thing that makes Reynolds stand out is how deeply connected they are to their community. That connection is more than customer service. It's institutional. The Reynolds Family Foundation, now in its second year, has already distributed more than \$120,000 in support to local families, food pantries, fire departments and nonprofit organizations. One of their biggest community events raised over \$60,000 in just three hours, with help from 36 local restaurants and a small army of volunteers.

A beautifully drawn map of the offerings at Reynolds Garden Shop.

Through the foundation, they've created a way for customers, vendors and even competitors to participate in something meaningful. You can learn more about their efforts and upcoming events at www.reynoldsfamilyfoundation.org. It reflects who they are as a company and how deeply they care about the people around them. It also helps build long-term loyalty. Customers come back not just for the products but for the sense of belonging. That personal connection is what big box stores can never replicate.



Peg put it best when she said, “People come in every day just for coffee or to see what’s new. They feel like this is their place. It’s like you’re sharing your home with them.”

That line stuck with me. Because when you walk through Reynolds, you feel that. It’s in the music, the plant quality, the customer service, the family dynamics, and the way the staff moves across departments. It’s a garden center, yes, but it’s also a place built with care.

There’s a lot that other garden centers can learn from Reynolds. Prioritize your team culture. Invest in the experience. Think seasonally, not just by the calendar but by your customers’ lifestyles. Build a brand that can stretch across departments while staying rooted in values. And if you have the heart and bandwidth, build something that gives back.

The company’s foundation raises and distributes money for local community needs.

For anyone thinking about how to elevate their own operation, Reynolds offers a blueprint. Their ability to expand thoughtfully, whether through retail categories, service offerings, or community engagement, shows what’s possible when you stay grounded in your values. From seasonal timing that matches the needs of a beach-town clientele to cross-trained staffing approaches that help the team stay responsive and engaged, there are real, practical lessons to take away.

Even more, they’ve done all this while never losing sight of who they are: a family sharing their passion and their place with others. That spirit is felt in every corner of the business, and it’s what truly makes Reynolds Garden Shop a standout. **GP**

David Williams, a fourth-generation garden center owner and former president of the Garden Centers of America (GCA), has recently embarked on a new venture as a partner at Garden Center Consultants, leveraging his extensive industry expertise to shape the future of garden retail. Contact him at dave@gardencenterconsultants.com.