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Thriving by Diversifying

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Garden centers everywhere have business challenges—especially in light of big box stores and Amazon encroaching on them.

Diane Salks, President of Riverview Tree & Landscaping Inc., inside the garden center, Riverview Gardens & Gifts.

“Diversify or die,” said Diane Salks, President of Riverview Tree & Landscaping, Inc., in Temple, Pennsylvania. She believes that you need to be flexible when owning a garden center.

The Riverview Story

Riverview Tree & Landscaping, Inc., a 52-year-old company based near Reading, is the parent company of Riverview Gardens & Gifts, which has evolved since its inception in 1985. Diane’s father, Donald Haas, started Riverview Tree & Landscaping in 1973. Twelve years later, he started a small garden center that grew to more than 5,000 sq. ft in 2006.

Riverview Tree & Landscaping, Inc. changed the garden center’s name to Riverview Gardens & Gifts in 2015. The garden center has transformed into a unique source of gifts for children and adults, as well as seasonal plants, herbs, perennials, organic vegetables, tropicals, and hundreds of shrub and tree varieties.

Diane became president of Riverview Tree & Landscaping when Donald retired in 1995.

“One feeds the other; the garden center is mainly for DIYers and the landscaping firm provides design, build, landscape maintenance, hardscape and pond installations, as well as complete property maintenance services,” said Diane of how the garden center and the landscaping company complement each other.

Diane has gained extensive experience running a garden center and landscaping company over the past 30 years. Here’s her advice for garden centers:

1. Watch trends.
2. Change content.
3. Don’t get stuck in this mindset: “This is how we’ve always done it.”

4. Look for the best products.
5. Diversifying is key.
6. Make your garden center a destination.
7. Provide outstanding customer service.
8. When you do promos—you're inviting the public, which is like inviting them to your home—be warm and welcoming.
9. Offering to plant what you sell—maybe not a full-blown landscaping company—but offering that type of service on a small scale is important.
10. Use your space and change it up—provide variety throughout the year—such as right now with Christmas; incorporate rooms displaying those types of items.



Only the Best & Garden Center Layout

Riverview Tree & Landscaping sources only grade #1 trees and shrubs, with the highest standards, fullest habits, and best root and branch structure. And their customer base loves these qualities, whether they're DIYers or have Riverview install these plants on their properties.

And that eye for quality extends to their landscaping business, where they complete every project—they don't just install softscapes or hardscapes and leave. Instead, Riverview's team installs mulch and other touches so the finished product looks its best.

Customers can find houseplants in the greenhouse, where the garden center also hosts events like a luau houseplant party, wreath-making classes, terrarium and bonsai workshops, and other activities.

"When we do an install, we finish everything—including mulching, adding soil, seeding, etc.," Diane said.

The garden center is divided into pond supplies and plants, tropicals, a children's gift shop, and gifts for men and women, including purses, puzzles and paint-by-number. Riverview Gardens & Gifts also hosts workshops throughout the year.

"In the winter, especially, people have more time to come to the workshops. We have a luau houseplant party, wreath classes—make your own, private classes with 10 or more, terrarium and bonsai workshops, and so much more," Diane said.



Family Matters

Riverview Tree & Landscaping, as well as its daughter company, Riverview Gardens & Gifts, are small family-run businesses. The family's commercial green thumb began when Diane's grandfather worked for Asplundh Tree Experts. Donald worked in the industry, doing tree work and property maintenance, before starting Riverview in 1973.

Three generations of the Salks family have worked in the family-owned garden center and landscaping company. From left to right: Daughter Alaina Salks, son Aleks

Salks, daughter-in-law, Aleah Salks. In the front middle is Diane Salks, president of Riverview Tree and Landscaping, holding a photo of her father, Donald Haas, the company's founder.

For the past 30 years, Diane has observed trends that ebb and flow—and she and her staff have adjusted the garden retail center and landscape trends to keep up. Today, her son, Aleks Salks, wears many hats: landscape, pond and hardscape designer and installer. Diane's daughter-in-law, Aleah Salks, is the garden center manager, and her daughter, Alaina Salks, runs the company's marketing department.

By diversifying and staying on top of trends, Riverview Gardens & Gifts continues to grow under Riverview Tree & Landscaping. **GP**

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