

Features

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Added Benefits Under Cover

Jennifer Polanz

More shopping under cover for bad weather days. Better organization and easier stocking. More room to stage pre-order product and pickup. A way to offer new products and reinvest back into a loyal community. These are all benefits I heard from retailers as they told me about their new greenhouses and why they pulled the trigger on building. Read on for details on their stories and the difference a new structure can make.



Dothan Nurseries, Dothan, Alabama

JD Boone worked closely with Chuck Sierke, who at the time was with Atlas Greenhouses and now has a consulting firm, Trans-Sphere Corporation, on his new Atlas Greenhouse that he cut the ribbon on earlier this year. The brand new 2,100-sq. ft. greenhouse complemented renovations done on the houseplant

greenhouse completed last year and the new space holds annuals, perennials and other color. It has a 1,500-sq. ft. section of covered canopy off the rear where products can be merchandised, as well as ridge vents and fans for ventilation and cooling.

The new Atlas Greenhouse at Dothan Nurseries features three peaks that often catch the attention of drivers on the busy highway in front of the business.

“The biggest benefit was the covered shopping,” said JD, who added their only rainy weekend was Mother’s Day Weekend. “Thought for sure we were washed out and no sales would happen. But people were here in droves—pouring rain, overflowing parking lot.

“Craziest thing I’ve ever seen.” He added it was somehow one of their top Mother’s Day Saturdays ... ever.



Groovy Plants Ranch, Fargo, Ohio

Jared and Liz Hughes, owners of Groovy Plants Ranch, have been expanding their footprint pretty consistently over the past couple of years at their cool haven for plant lovers north of Columbus. This winter they added 35,000 sq. ft. of the Rovero Roll-Air model greenhouse split by a loading dock (a necessity due to space logistics).

The greenhouse closest to the entrance (left) shows how open the Rovero Roll-Air can get, with sides rolled up and the top completely open. It can open or close within one minute. It's used for pre-orders and growing. The greenhouse farther back (right) is separated by the dock and houses more growing space.

The goals are twofold: To house the increasingly popular pre-order pick-up business close to the entrance where signage directs customers in an orderly fashion, and also to use the nifty easy rollback roof system to grow better plants (mostly perennials, but also harden off some annuals and vegetables).

"It allows us to grow completely outside, which is the best way to grow," said Jared, demonstrating how quickly the roof system moves—which is pretty darned quickly. They'll be able to open it up in early spring production and even take advantage of rain to flush the plants and help them harden off, while providing better ventilation.

The new space, which takes the place of quonset houses that they moved toward the back of the property, has increased their growing output so they're buying in less product and producing more of their own. They're still putting the finishing touches on the flooring, but the rest is completed.



Plantpeddler Floral, Garden & Gift, Cresco, Iowa

Garden center retail isn't new at Plantpeddler, the large young plant business in Cresco, Iowa. It's been baked into the operation from the beginning with a florist operation to boot. But what IS new is the approximately 8,800-sq. ft. Westland Greenhouse structure that's naturally ventilated with double ridge vents, said John

Gooder. His wife, Molly, runs the retail side of the operation, and the new structure also includes a 4,900 sq. ft. steel clearspan building by Varco Pruden with a 68 ft. x 37 ft. mezzanine. The new structures allow for more retail merchandising, gift products and florist coolers, as well as event space.

With all the new retail space, Molly Gooder at Plantpeddler Floral, Garden & Gift is planning to hold porch pot classes this fall and possibly even yoga classes taught by a local instructor. In late winter, they hosted a fun puzzle-themed event that customers are requesting again.

The building includes a 12-ft. wrap-around porch where customers can come sit and eat the Chocolate Shoppe ice cream they buy from the store (made in Madison, Wisconsin). All the floors are concrete, and all benching and displays are modular and removable to allow for flexibility in opening up the floor space if needed.

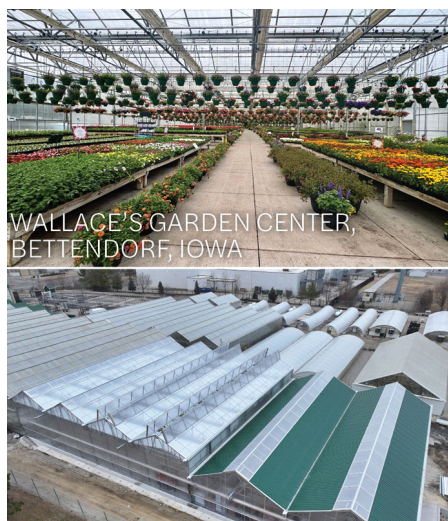
"We have people from all over who have been coming in. Even people from out of town who had never been to our old retail," Molly said. "They come in and say, 'This is amazing!'"

On the florist side, they've already set a record for Valentine's Day sales and surpassed the amount of weddings they'd done previously, booked out for several more months.

"Molly has surpassed every budget forecast we put in place," John said. "We've increased sales and foot traffic."

For both of them, one of the most important aspects of building the retail was to give back to the community that's given them so much support.

"For us to reinvest to get people back into Cresco and to shop around Cresco was a big part of the reason why we made the investment," John added. "It's been cool to make an impact on our small community."



Wallace's Garden Center, Bettendorf, Iowa

Wallace's new Prospiant greenhouse was born out of necessity, as fire destroyed the previous one (thankfully, no one was injured). What started with tragedy ended up an opportunity, as owner Kate Terrell took a step back and looked at what was needed. The retail side is about 7,000 sq. ft of Nexus Dual Atrium greenhouse and the production part is about 5,000 sq. ft. of Nexus Vail house that includes the grower desk, employee lockers, tools and equipment (soil mixer, pot filler, sprayer, conveyors, etc). The Vail has a steel roof with twinwall polycarbonate vents.

The inside of the retail greenhouse (left) and an overhead shot of both greenhouses (right). The overhead photo was taken by Ball Publishing Videographer Osvaldo Cuevas while he and Jen Zurko were out visiting earlier this year.

"On the retail side, it is a better customer experience," Kate noted. "It has better climate control with open vents and shade cloth system. It also has no cooling fans, so it's quieter."

They poured concrete for the whole building, improving over the concrete walks between gravel and dirt from before. The bonus? No more weed issues under the benches, Kate said. "We can change the arrangement of the benches and we were able to create wider aisles. We put in Cherry Creek basket systems with Water by Weight irrigation, so the hanging baskets are better quality with less labor and easier for customers to see them all."

They also found it was easier to restock benches with the multiple doors, allowing them to get carts closer to benches without blocking aisles or getting in the way of customers. And while Kate said it will take more time to see the full financial impact, greenhouse numbers were up for the year.

On the production side, there's more space and it was designed with processes and efficiencies in mind, making it safer for employees with more room to work. Employees have a personal locker now to store their belongings and work items, and there's more space to keep "sold" product for special orders.

"We were able to take on more custom potting orders earlier in the season since we had dedicated space to plant and keep the plants until they could be picked up or delivered," Kate added. "The employees really appreciate all the improvements and recognize how it has made things easier for them."

"The bottom line is that it's cleaner, more organized, better for employee productivity and morale, and more

customer friendly." **GP**