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Developing the Bench

Jennifer Polanz



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I grew up knowing quite a bit about sports of all kinds, which could easily be attributed to a sports-obsessed older brother. College, pro, baseball, football, basketball, auto racing—it didn't matter what it was, we watched it and read the box scores the next day.

Thanks to that love of sports, I've taken to heart several sports-themed mantras (most clichéd, but still appropriate) that I often think about and repeat. One of my all-time favorites was told to me by Ohio State football legend and two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin when I got to interview him once (it's one he's well known for saying): "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog." He was told it early on when he was worried about how his small size

would affect his football career.

Another one I often find myself repeating is the Wayne Gretzky classic: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take." A final one I hear about sports, but actually appears to be attributed to a Roman philosopher: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

Why am I invoking all these inspirational quotes? They're the ones that keep repeating in my head as I worked on my cover story this month highlighting our *Green Profit*/The Garden Center Group Young Retailer Award Winner Tyler Cerbo. As someone who played college football, Tyler has probably heard all of these and many more, but he—and his team there—really embodies the drive and the preparation needed to meet the opportunity available. His family's garden center, Cerbo's Parsippany Greenhouse, was struggling after the Great Recession, and it took a lot of fight, even as they were downsizing, and a few leaps of faith to change what hadn't been working. It also took a little luck, but a whole lot more preparation, to course correct and start the continuous growth period they've had for several years now, with the most growth coming in the years after COVID.

I'd also like to point out that Tyler, their general manager, was one of three finalists from very different garden centers for the Young Retailer Award and all of these operations have one thing in common: they're developing their benches. At Benken Garden Center and Florist in Cincinnati, Maria Harford is an invaluable member of their team who was nominated for her "technical competence, leadership, collaborative approach and super-fun personality." Meanwhile at Willow Greenhouse in Northville, Michigan, Iz Paurazas, is rocking the retail, houseplants and tropicals department with new ideas, excellent execution and customer education to build brand loyalty in a growing

houseplant-focused demographic.

I want to commend all these retailers for investing in our finalists and helping to develop into the industry's future leaders. And if you don't think that's what's happening, look no further than to the 2027 HRI Leadership Academy Class with four previous Young Retailer finalists and winners—congratulations to Esmeralda Carrasco, Tanner Jones, Jake Scott and Lindsay Squires!

I'm excited for the future of our industry, as I know the people I've mentioned here and along with many more, will find new and creative ways to bring people into the gardening fold and spark a love of plants in generations to come. To that end, we do have a few stories in this month's issue to help them and you figure that part out (you knew I'd get around to the rest of this issue eventually).

Retailers just like you took to the show floor at Cultivate'26 looking for interesting products that customers might love and you can find their Retailers' Choice Award winners. Then Matt Olson shows us five annuals that might pique your customers' interest and set you apart from the box stores. And to help you get your creative juices flowing, Katie Elzer-Peters continues her exploration of the ways garden retail and art can intersect to delight your customers and make them want to come back for more.

I'll let you peruse the rest of the issue to find the rest of the gems in here. Meanwhile, if it's a Saturday in September, there's a fall planter to make up and Buckeye game to watch. O-H!

Here's to developing your bench!