

# Third place winners, hold the phone, fires and finding connections



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2022

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## Green Profit's **buZZ!**

Retail news from inside and outside the green industry

**COMING UP THIS WEEK:**  
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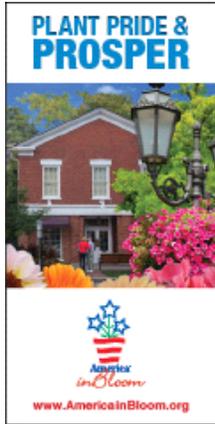
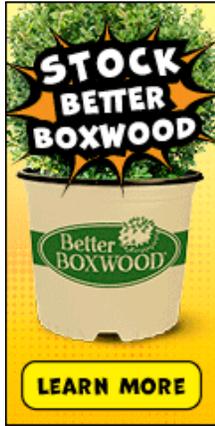


### Just a Reminder

*I am off for the month of October. I've brought in some excellent and very well-qualified individuals to fill in while I am gone. See you in November!*

### Hey There!

I'm Katie Elzer-Peters, a *total buZZ!* groupie, Ellen Wells fan and your guest editor of the week. You know me as a frequent contributor of tech and couch-related articles in *Green Profit*. I'm also the owner of *The Garden of Words, LLC*. For 15 years my team of horticultural marketers and web developers and I have been creating websites, running email programs and connecting garden industry businesses to other amazing marketing specialists. That's part one of our



company mission: connecting.

Part two is giving back by providing tech-related education and resources specifically for marketing green industry products and services. To that end, we're doing free fall (to prevent freefalls) lunch & learns. Up next, October 25 at noon Eastern is the "DIY Website Face Lift." You can sign up [HERE](#). No sales pitch, just solid tips for whipping your website into shape before spring. Can't make it? Sign up to get the recording.



You might have caught on that our theme this week is connection. Let's go!



## Third Place Winners

Earlier in October I spoke at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference. I learned as much as I taught, and brought back these tidbits for you.

Amanda Thomsen, author of the *Green Profit* Kiss My Aster column and owner of the new plant shop, [Aster Gardens](#), was another speaker in the retail track. Wednesday night, we attended the splendid "Gathering" dinner alongside Niagara Falls and talked shop, specifically her new shop. "I want Aster Gardens to be a third place." "YES!" I almost shouted.



Why get excited about third place? Well, the first place is home, the second is work, and the third is a gathering place. If you want, take a deep dive into the origin of all of this in my November 2021 *Green Profit* article [HERE](#). Long story short, Starbucks really leaned into being a gathering place or a “third space” in much the same way that a church or civic organization might function. Due to changing consumer habits and, let’s be real, the pandemic, Starbucks is getting OUT of being a third place. That leaves an opening for. . . you guessed it. . . garden centers and plant shops to invite people to stay awhile and, dare we say, *connect*? She’s making Aster Gardens an enticing place to visit and hang by providing these things:

- Inspiring and outrageous decor and merchandising.
- Low-stakes adventure in the form of fun and interesting social media posts designed to inspire intrigue and action (visiting).
- A specific vibe that certain customers will REALLY connect with (and others won’t), fostering a sense of community for those that do.
- A couch.

Point being, if you want to people to stay, you have to give them a reason to. Oh, and by the way, Amanda’s couch will be up for sale in the spring, and a new couch will arrive.



## Work From Finish to Start

Thursday at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference was all about garden retail. After Amanda and I spoke, Jeff Beattie from Winona Gardens, Terry Colasanti of Colasanti Farms Ltd., and Miguel Mori of Hendriks Greenhouses/Freeman Herbs/Tropi Co shared their experiences with ecommerce for retail and shipping in Canada.

Miguel spoke about how to connect processes and systems to the customer experience in order to smooth out ecommerce kinks.

When it comes to designing ecommerce paths to purchase, he says to work “Finish to start.” Begin at the end with the customer experience goal in mind and then reverse engineer the process to get there. By starting at the end you won’t overbuild your system and you won’t miss any key parts along the way.

What sort of process has been wonky for you this year? Tracking pre-orders? Delivering bulk mulch? Event registrations? Spend some time this winter to reimagine it, starting with the end.



## Ecommerce to Enhance Brick and Mortar Retail

“Getting an ecommerce site up quickly in Spring 2020 saved our business,” said Jeff Beattie. Many of you have similar stories. Now that we can be open for browsing and for ecommerce at the same time, it takes some care and adjustment to ensure that ecommerce isn’t a profit-sucking distraction. Here’s how panelists and attendees at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference do it:

- Shipping? Focus on putting niche products, not everything, online. Terry said that for their online store, they put carnivorous plants and other specialty items up for sale for shipping and leave out the rest.
- Shopping? As in, encouraging customers to come in and shop? Jeff and Amanda both said that customers absolutely browse online availability before coming into the store to buy in person. A good example of a non-ecommerce ecommerce strategy is what Fairview Garden Center in North Carolina does. They put plants up online like shoppable products, but where the “shop now” button would be normally, the page says “Find at Fairview Garden Center” and links to the page with directions to the garden center. See the photo below or click [HERE](#) to see an example.



- Click and Collect: Terry stressed that ecommerce is great for surge times when you might have a full parking lot. People can check to see what you have or order online for pickup. For example, mulch, bagged soil, fertilizer and orders for bigger plantings, such as 10 flats of mixed-color pansies.
- Event registration: This is a no brainer.
- Enhance Cash Flow and Engage Customers: Deb Foisey of Deb's Greenhouse has been honing her ecommerce pre-order process for the last decade. Not only do pre-orders help with planning, they also generate cashflow during the time she's closed AND provide a way for her customers to stay engaged and connected, even when there's snow on the ground.

**THE SEASON IS HERE!**  
 Get the tags & labels you need. As requested.  
**DELIVERED ON TIME.**

## Hold the Phone

Dr. Alex Grygorczyk from the Vineland Research & Innovation Centre in Ontario presented some vital information about why customers *don't* buy plants online. The Centre did an intercept survey in garden centers during which they stopped customers to ask some questions before they checked out. What they found was that most customers choose plants for specific spots in their yard. It's, therefore, vital for the shoppers to see accurate pictures, dimensions and growing information while shopping for plants online, otherwise they can't be certain that the plants they pick will work well in the intended planting spot.



Plainly: stock photos and no info *don't* cut it. So, *do* hold your phone, take pictures of the plants onsite, and show customers realistic, real-world images of what to expect. They will connect with those images because they are real. They will *believe* those images, even if they aren't as perfect as stock photos.

### “Leg Godt”

While writing this newsletter, I kept picturing two LEGO bricks snapped together. A deep dive into how LEGOs came to exist revealed a pretty wild story. Ole Kirk Kristiansen founded the LEGO company in 1932 (after already experiencing one devastating fire) and named the company LEGO, in a nod to the Danish phrase “Leg Godt,” meaning “to play well.” In 1942 a second fire leveled his business. He rebuilt with help from the community.

Post-World War II supply chain issues (wood was becoming difficult to source) prompted Ole Kirk to learn more about the emerging technology of injection molded plastic. His kids weren't thrilled about the new direction of the company (family businesses, eh?), but Ole Kirk knew he had to keep evolving to keep the company relevant. He designed the first LEGO bricks, almost identical to the ones we love ~~(to hate stepping on)~~ today.



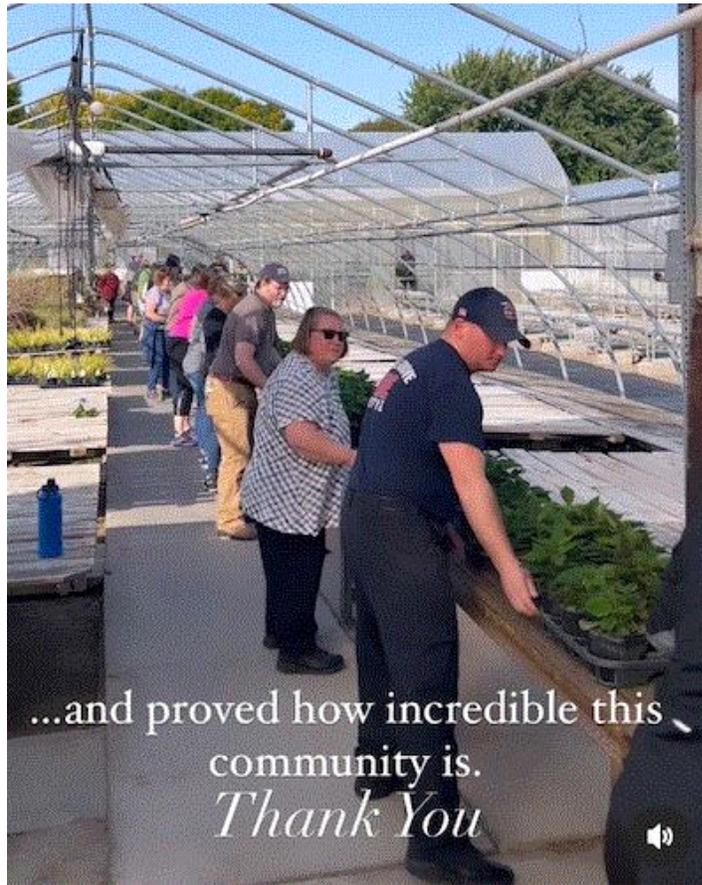
A *third* fire down the road destroyed any remaining wood products, and the company decided to leave wood behind and fully embrace the LEGO bricks. Once again, their community rallied to help LEGO rebuild.

## Speaking of Fires ...

I'm not sure if you heard, but on the night of October 2, Lynde Greenhouse and Nursery in Maple Grove, Minnesota, suffered a devastating fire that caused a complete loss to the warehouse, loading dock, storage area, production offices, employee break area and plant production line at the greenhouse. The owners put out a call on social media for the community to help "Save Christmas."

And, well, [HERE](#) is what happened.





What I have learned is that if you do, in fact, *start* by imagining the *finish*, you can build such strong connections that when everything feels like or actually is burning down around you, those connections will be your path to safety, prosperity and longevity.

*Thank you for being a great sub, Katie!*

*If you enjoyed Katie's storytelling and actionable tips, you'll love her quasi every-other-week newsletter. You can sign up [HERE](#).*

Hey, folks. If you are wondering what I am up to this month, head over to my Substack

newsletter [HERE](#) and sign up for updates. Meanwhile, if you have questions, comments, suggestions, drop me a line if you'd like at [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).



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