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Creating a Vibrant Community

Ann-Marie Vazzano

People passing through Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, on a summer day are greeted with vibrant hanging baskets and lush planters that spruce up the city's streets, bus stops and parks. What residents might not realize, though, is that a local business—Mostardi Nursery—is a key contributor to the town's aesthetic appeal.

Owner Steve Mostardi admits he's not one to toot his business' own horn, although he has every right to. In 2015, Mostardi reached out to community members who'd started a town beautification project and told them about the nationwide America In Bloom program.

"As I helped them get better acquainted with America In Bloom, they realized it would be the ideal program for them to become further involved," Steve says.

Mostardi Nursery, which was a retail-grower before transitioning to retail-only, offered to grow the plants for the 2-ft. diameter hanging baskets and other planters, which are then sold below cost to the township. Mostardi brings in approximately 3,000 starter plugs from Proven Winners and other growers, and plants them in February so they're ready for display by early May.

"Over the years, we've developed a formula that has proven to be an ideal combination of colorful display and ability to adapt to a somewhat limited watering routine," Steve explains.

The combinations' primary ingredient is Proven Winners' Supertunia Vista Petunia, which Steve says has been ideal for flower production and tolerance of adverse conditions. "Then we have some component plants that we use in conjunction to give it some variety and some extra texture," he adds.

The Logistics

Growing and displaying the planters is just part of the puzzle—keeping them watered and healthy is another. During Newtown Square In Bloom's first few years, the township hired private contractors to handle the watering. However, after seeing the program's success, the town supervisors committed to finding a way to maintain the plants internally.

The solution lie in an out-of-service street sweeper, which, with a water tank already attached, was a no-brainer.

“All it took was the passenger in the street sweeper to hold the watering wand outside the window and water the baskets,” Steve says. “So that was the key to success in a lot of ways.”

Unfortunately, the program was suspended in 2020 due to COVID-19, and because of continued uncertainty, a scaled-back version of Newtown Square In Bloom is planned for this year. Mostardi will grow about half as many plants, which will be placed in a town center garden and other key locations, including bus stops. The hope is for the hanging baskets to return in 2022.

A Win-Win

Steve says Newtown Square in Bloom is a way of giving back to the locals who support his business and it helps advertise, in a subliminal way, the benefits of flowers. “It makes it pleasant for people to come and shop and to visit, so it’s great to see that kind of impact,” he says.

In addition, the program has led to the adoption of a tree-planting initiative that will result in thousands of new trees throughout Newtown Square.

“A lot of people may see it as beautification, but it’s not just beautification,” Steve notes. “It’s quality of life, which really is fundamental to the value of our industry’s product.”

Getting Involved

Steve Mostardi highly recommends America In Bloom, but notes it’s helpful to network with other community members who might share an interest in the initiative. Ideally, communities should have one or two AIB champions who can help persuade local officials to join the program, which does require a membership fee. For more information, visit americainbloom.org.

About This Series

In 2021, we will feature a different garden retailer each month from The Garden Center Group’s Best Practices group. These retailers achieved 10% or more profit in the previous year (the first couple of features are from the 2019 Best Practices Group). The Garden Center Group offers Weekly Department Reviews, as well as an Annual P&L Study for those clients who wish to participate. Both are actionable reports that retailers can use to benchmark off of and grow sales in specific categories. Find out more at www.thegardencentergroup.com. **GP**