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Making Connections

Jennifer Polanz



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In my line of work, you cannot be an introvert.

In my former life as a newspaper journalist, I approached strangers on the street and queried them about gas prices, weather predictions, politics and other “man-on-the-street” type issues. I’ve knocked on more doors than I can count.

In the hort industry, knocking on doors has become emails, phone calls and Zooms, along with in-person visits and trade show conversations. The best part is, I actually get to make meaningful connections. Every day I get to talk to very knowledgeable people and learn about something new, whether it’s the latest houseplant trends, new pests or difficult topics like the challenges facing retail today.

I also get to meet new people, which is another aspect of my job I love. Every year through our Young Retailer Award I get to meet three new young people who work to make a difference at their garden center and in their local community. We choose three nominees based on submissions by someone they work with or themselves, and we ask those three to write an essay about a specific topic.

This month you can read those essays. We asked them to write about relationships, and how they build and maintain important connections with their vendors and their employees. We thought it was the right question this year because when you’re faced with challenges, it’s vital to be able to communicate and work with the people who keep you in business. And between inflation, labor shortages, a COVID pandemic (endemic?) that just won’t quit and supply chain issues, well, we’ve got challenges.

Our three Young Retailer nominees wrote excellent essays that included a host of strategies for keeping their relationships going strong. And I’d like to thank two big connections—The Garden Center Group and AmericanHort—for their ongoing support of our Young Retailer program. Their support allows us to continue to bring these young talents forward and help them gain new connections in the industry by bringing them to Cultivate each year and recognizing them at the Unplugged event.

I also want to recognize a couple more connections to *Green Profit*. Ann-Marie Vazzano brought customer trends to the forefront via the Consumer Buzz section for more than nine years. This month is her last in these pages, as she moves to a full-time position at *Cleveland Magazine*. I want to thank Ann-Marie for all her hard work over the years and congratulate her on her new role—she will be missed!

The other connection I'd like to call out is the last of three features written by industry advocate, organizational expert and pep-talker extraordinaire John Kennedy. You can find his continued exploration of the beauty of agritourism through hosting weddings on the farm. Thanks, John, for contributing these thoughtful pieces to our magazine. If you'd like to hear more about agritourism, too, you can check out his talk and a subsequent panel discussion on Monday at Cultivate this year.

Katie Elzer-Peters is a long-time friend of the magazine who has an uncanny knack for spotting trends out in the wild. This month, she tackles the popularity of garden center merch and why you should put your brand on t-shirts, stickers and more (lots of people love to sport apparel with their favorite shops on it!).

Just to throw in some Easter eggs, there are a lot of musical references in this issue, including in a sidebar about, well, Easter eggs. See if you can find them all. **GP**