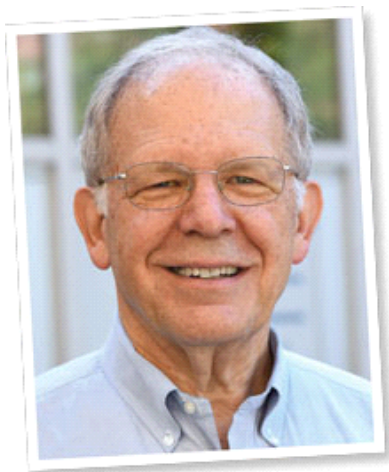


6/1/2022

Be Different, Crazy & Goofy

Bill McCurry



Bill McCurry

"We are different, crazy and goofy," says Chris Baker of Baker's Acres in Alexandria, Ohio. "It brings people from all over to come and see us."

Chris and Nancy Baker are well-known for their less than orthodox way of running a garden center and nursery. They were leaders decades ago with their themed bathrooms, which people would travel to see. In May, they sell "plants for food." Customers who bring home-baked goodies for the staff get \$10 off plant purchases. Baker's held midnight sales, dragging people out to the nursery in the middle of the night with music provided by Chris' band, "The Hip Replacements," so-called because Chris is the only member of the original band. "That name has different meanings because we are different."

Baker's Acre's website shows their "crazy and goofy" approach under the [Mission Statement page on their website](#).

Today, Chris and Nancy have passed the baton to their son Nick and his wife Pam. The new management team is crazy about exotic plants and has catapulted off-season sales with occasional Friday night plant drops.

Nick observed exotic or high-end tropical plant buyers are very particular. If they'll pay hundreds or thousands of dollars for a plant, it better be prime quality. When customers handle them, leaves can break off, dramatically devaluing a high-end exotic plant.

Nick moved the exotics to a non-public growing area. Pictures are sent out digitally so customers can get excited and plan their purchases. A plant drop is announced, for example, Friday at 9:00 p.m. All week customers are teased with what will be available by seeing pictures of the specific plants. At the specified time, the product is posted online using Squarespace and immediately a majority of the product is sold. All sales are billed at the time of the order. Pickup from the nursery must be completed within a week. Plant drops are just one of the many unorthodox ways Baker's Acres keeps their customers engaged in a way others can't match.

Debbie Foisy (Deb's Greenhouse in Morinville, Alberta, Canada) took a collaborative approach and created a map of the independent greenhouses in the Edmonton area. Customers would tell her, "I didn't know you were here" or "I didn't know how to get here." Deb took the idea to the local Economic Development entity. They thought it was a superb idea, but couldn't promise bureaucratic approval soon. Deb is different. Deb is focused on results. She looked up how to make a Google Map others could access. A new marketing tool was born.

Her passion for the industry, inspired her to make a credible map of the Edmonton area based on her knowledge of garden centers she knew first-hand or from reps, search engines and other tools. It was so successful nearby areas asked to be included. Deb contacted local media, who promoted the map providing Deb's website as the "go-to place" to get the link. This year it became a province-wide marketing tool, with 191 independent garden centers. (See it yourself at debsgreenhouse.com.) At press time there were more than 100,000 downloads.

Greenhouses from other provinces called and asked to be added to the map. Deb's logical response was, "Make one for your area. It's easy to do on Google." If fellow garden centers need help, she'll answer questions and mentor, but it's up to each local area to "Just Do It."

Teamwork (from Baker's Acres)

The way we see it, customers and staff are all on the same team and we both have important jobs.

Your Jobs (Customers)

- Come here with a smile
- Wear proper shoes and appropriate clothing
- Ask questions so you can be successful gardeners

Our Jobs

- Come here with a smile
- Wear proper shoes and appropriate clothing (Baker's Acres shirts)
- Answer questions so you can be successful gardeners

Hey, wait a minute. These two lists are almost the same. The big difference is you guys get the best parking spaces. **GP**

Bill McCurry would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.