

## Features

7/1/2022

## Making Sure You Succeed

Ellen C. Wells



When Joey Bokor began dating Kim Kerby—a garden center kid—at the age of 15, little did he know he'd end up co-running her family's business. Helping out in his girlfriend's nursery now and then became more involved as their own relationship evolved. And when Kim and Joey eventually married in 2005—during the store's 25th anniversary year—the newlyweds officially took over her parents' business.

*Pictured: Completed in mid-January, this covered entry serves as a much-needed checkout location with multiple registers.*

The Bokors can feel pretty good about what Kerby's Nursery has become under their stewardship. It's a business rooted in service to the community, to its customers and to nature. I toured the nursery with Kim and Joey in mid-January and came away with the following insights and ideas.

### It's About Community

How do you keep folks coming back to the store for trees, shrubs and perennials? The Kerby's staff work hard to build a sense of community with their customers. The Bokors weekly e-newsletter, "Life Lived Outside," isn't just a listing of gardening tips and what's on sale but is a sharing of their life stories. These missives humanize the Kerby's brand, make them real people—just like the folks reading it. That community connection compels folks to come in to shop, learn and even just talk to one another.



## Butterflies, Real and Painted

Kerby's pollinator-friendly plants are the second-most popular category after edibles. Their Butterfly House, erected in 2020, is a hit with young and old alike who are looking for both the winged creatures and the plants they feed and nest on.

And if the butterflies, chrysalis or caterpillars aren't around or active, you can become one yourself. The two butterfly murals are popular places for Instagram-worthy photo opportunities. The larger mural is composed of paintings of all the flowers they sell. Amazing!

## It's Not about Annuals

Annuals can be a hard sell in Florida because, well, they aren't necessarily annuals. They just kind of go on forever and folks don't want to rip them out to replace them. Kerby's focuses on selling trees, shrubs and perennials because, as Joey says, "there's always room for one more plant." Sales of fruit trees and bushes were astronomical during the pandemic because, as Joey and Kim believe, people had a concern about how they were going to feed themselves. Sales of vegetable plants were also through the roof. They sold out of mango trees!

## Here to Help

Kerby's tagline is, "Anyone can sell you plants. We make sure you succeed." To that end, Kerby's signage sings with that messaging. Want to succeed? Use this compost blend or fertilizer. They also host workshops on gardening topics as well as have staff well-versed in directing customers to finding the answers to their questions.



## Houseplants are a Hit

Kerby's has definitely seen an uptick in interest in houseplants. The most popular varieties they sell today are pretty much the same as when the garden center opened 40 years ago: pothos, calatheas, monsteras, hoyas and peperomias. Both Joey and Kim said it was neat to see 20-somethings interested in this category and snapping photos of themselves with the plants. They also indicated that this generation prefers their color to be on leaves rather than on flowers. Colorful leaves? They've got that!



## The Weirdest Best Seller Is ...

A kid-sized dinosaur. People of all ages just love 'em! **GP**