



Finding a Place

A CAREER IN HORTICULTURE HAS A LOT TO OFFER TO TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE. THE KEY IS TO LET THEM KNOW WHAT A GREAT INDUSTRY IT IS!

Rick Schoellhorn

I was recently asked to give a presentation as part of the Jack Williams Honorarium to the Pi Alpha Xi group at Ohio State University.

When they asked what I would like to speak about, it struck me that our industry is at a turning point — we have begun making fundamental changes in how we do things, who does them and who our target audiences are.

While we still have a lot of our traditional industry values, we are poised to continue to make even larger changes in the way we do things.

To complete those changes and to continue to advance as an industry, we will need the next generation of people in place. So I decided the talk would be about how young people might look at our industry and how they can see where they have a future in the floricultural industry.

Who Are We?

When you have an established industry like ours, which is on the brink (or in the midst) of change it can be a bit intimidating for a student or new employee to figure out where they fit. In the scope of things, we are a small industry. We all know one another, know most of the players, and usually have met most of the personalities that rep-

resent each firm at one time or another.

We do not have a reputation among students and employees as being a high paying field, we attract members first based on a love of nature and plants, and second on a desire to do something they love. Entering horticulture to get rich is not a common reason given for why someone is in our industry.

So when I talk to potential students or professionals in our industry, I think it is fair to address salary and money, but always balance it against the value of doing what you love.

Why Horticulture?

When I worked in the university system, the most common reason I got from returning students, who were leaving a professional career in another area to get into horticulture was they were tired of doing a job that had no inherent joy. That inherent feeling of making a difference and loving what you do is one of our industry's strengths. Being a small industry reinforces this.

In the future, our industry will remain one where you can have a professional and personal interaction with the industry at large, as well as a very personal sense of fulfillment because you are a part of something. The industry is small enough

you can maintain relationships and feel a sense of connection. It also means that for new people entering our industry that they need to keep a good relationship with everyone, because we are small enough that today's competitor can easily become tomorrow's employer.

Finding Our Voice

Our industry has many long term voices. As an industry this needs to be a focus for us, to keep finding new voices to promote not only internally but to the consuming public at large. Because of the long standing voices that are speaking for us, we appear almost static to newcomers, the people speaking about our industry are the same people who have been doing it for 15 or 20 years.

While those of us in the industry either find this comforting or we take it for granted, we need to focus on finding new voices. This is a huge opportunity for new people entering the industry!

We need new voices, voices who can speak to a changing demographic of consumers as well as to the industry. We should never reach the point where we stop listening to new ideas because the people presenting them are the same ones we heard 10 years ago.

Whether a new person comes into our industry via academic research, or one of the industry segments like retail, wholesale, cut floral or landscape, we need their fresh perspectives to be promoted through all of our channels. We can't as an

industry continue to rely on the old familiar faces and perspectives.

Promoting horticulture needs to continue on all levels:

- Industry media;

- Internet personality;
- Television personality;
- Consumer press; and
- Localized/regional expertise.

This kind of work is essential and ranks high among our bright young horticulturists as a preferred career. We need to step aside and give these young voices room to grow.

A Global Industry

We are a global industry, but for most, our global presences are invisible to new people entering our industry. Understanding our industry on a global level is something one has to travel to see and comprehend.

For a large portion of our industry, the pros and cons of international markets are not something they hear a lot about. We need to change this and make our international roles more apparent to young people. There are many careers in our industry that can take a person to international levels on a regular basis as well as the jobs that allow a person to stay tied to their local community.

For new people coming into the industry, the global aspects of what we do are a huge draw. There is so much room for globalism in our industry, we need translators, we need people who love to travel and take applications across borders, and we need young people to help the U.S. industry remain vital because they have been exposed to international business. We breed our crops on foreign soil, we produce our cuttings and seed outside the bounds of the United States, and we have to deal with laws instituted to protect movement of plant materials back and forth across the border. It is a shrinking planet, and we need these new young voices to help us integrate with this increasingly more global future.

A Changing of the Guard

The history of our industry is not readily available. How we did things 50 years ago is so completely different than how we do things today. It's a sign of the times, right?

But like all industries, we are facing a change of the guard from people who were aware of that process and we are replacing them with people who have no idea where this industry came from. So their perspectives are very different



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from those who have been here through parts of the last 50 years.

The history of the floriculture industry is an amazing and interesting story. From Tulipmania to Raulstonia, from the discovery of photoperiod to the mapping of the DNA of Petunia — this is

a vital ongoing process and we need to make sure that all members of our industry know about where we came from. It gives the new members of our industry a way to feel connected to something larger than themselves; and that is more and more a need new employees and students have. It helps

us all feel relevant, and that is a key part of what brings new people into our industry.

The wavefront of our changing understanding of genetics is another huge area for growth — and an area that attracts a lot of young people. The advances in molecular technology, the whole GMO debate, the understanding of new laboratory breeding techniques are nothing short of a great science fiction novel.

It doesn't matter (in terms of finding and holding great young minds) so much which side of these issues you stand on. What does matter is that there is so much passion for one perspective or another. This is the future unfolding right in front of us. Who will shape it? Who will advance it?

In another 10 years plants will be emerging on the market that are not possible now. Genetics is the "computer technology" of our industry — a fundamental change that moves so quickly it forces you to change simply to stay functional in the new market.

That speed of development and innovation is a huge draw to young professionals. As an industry we need to promote this area to new employees and students. It is a fascinating and lucrative area to build a career in.

A Bright Future

Our industry offers a huge array of potential careers, and almost every one of them has a greater potential for effecting change than at any other time in our short history — because the entire industry is changing almost daily. Whether you are a grower, interested in marketing and sales, breeding and genetics, distribution, information, education, landscaping, or organic production this is such a great time to enter our industry as the rules are being rewritten in so many areas. It is a time when a person's contribution can truly impact our lives.

One final statement; in all of these jobs, we all started out thinking we would grow something but in the end you realize that no matter where you choose to fit in you will end up growing people. ☺

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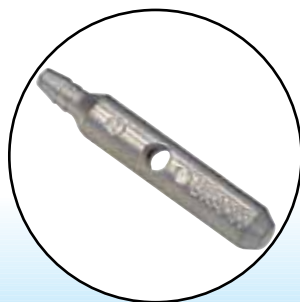
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