

# Summer Shows

Traveling the summer trade shows and touring greenhouses can be educational and fun.

By Carrie Burns

June and July are host to two of the industry's most important shows. Southeast Greenhouse Conference in June and OFA Short Course in July are two of the industry's largest, most grower-friendly shows, so whether you're looking for a new piece of equipment, scheduling meetings with vendors or seeking a few production tips, these are "can't miss" events.

## SOUTHEAST GREENHOUSE CONFERENCE

Since the first conference in 1993, the Southeast Greenhouse Conference (SGC), held in Greenville, S.C., has become nationally recognized as one of only four major conferences and trade shows in U.S. floriculture. It is produced as a combined effort of the state grower associations, cooperative extension services and land grant universities in seven Southeastern states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. But don't write this off as just a regional show; it's becoming a powerhouse for growers and retailers alike from all over.

**Trade show and seminars.** SGC seems to get better every year, attracting approximately 3,000 people and featuring more than 400 booths this year. The seminar topics were right on target with what growers in the

region want to know. From John Dole (North Carolina State University), Allen Hammer (Purdue University) and Jim Barrett (University of Florida) on poinsettias to Holly Scoggins (Virginia Tech University), Carol Reese (University of Tennessee) and Joyce Latimer (Virginia Tech University) on herbaceous perennials, attendees were able to learn about many topics from the leading experts in the industry. Before the keynote address, given by Jim Nau of Ball Seed about the history of the U.S. horticulture industry, SGC handed out its Horticulture Initiative Award to Paul Nelson, North Carolina State University, for his work in horticulture.

Another important event that took place during the conference was the announcement of Terri Cantwell, Bates Son's & Daughters, Lake Placid, Fla., as the new Southeast Greenhouse Conference's Board of Directors Chair. Cantwell is the first female elected to this position.

With growers in the region actually making money this spring, their attention seemed to be freed to talk about lots of different topics, and the word around the show really varied. Growers chatted about the weather and spring in the Southeast, and academia conversations consisted of research and the decline in funding.

**Travel in North Carolina.** Traveling to trade shows is a great opportunity to see what's going on in greenhouses around the country, and traveling to the Carolinas provided a prime chance to visit Metrolina Greenhouses, Huntersville, N.C., and Banner Greenhouses, Nebo, N.C.

This was my second visit to Metrolina with Jim Barrett, University of Florida and *GPN's* consulting editor, in the last three years, and it amazed me again just like the first time. They had a lot more product in the greenhouse than I expected, but then I remembered their summer program. Metrolina always has something new going on. They recently implemented a trial garden to find out how the varieties they are growing are going to work for the consumer; additionally, the mass merchant supplier is prepar-



**Top:** Southeast Greenhouse Conference. **Left:** On our pre-conference greenhouse tour, we received an extensive tour of Metrolina Greenhouses, including its large on-site trial garden. **Right:** Banner Greenhouses showed us its stepped-up mixed container program and new tagging.

## news feature

ing for a 50-acre build. Nothing is slowing down at Metrolina, and the expansion shows it.

After Barrett and I were finished touring Metrolina we drove over to Nebo, N.C., where we met

up with Jim Faust, Clemson University, to tour Banner Greenhouses. This was my first visit to Banner, and what a difference in size and marketing style from Metrolina. In the last year or so this mid-size greenhouse —

yes, we had a discussion and determined it is a mid-size operation — has shifted production to capitalize on its ability to grow high-quality larger containers. Jeff Mast of Banner developed a plan to increase the value of the mixed



In a 15- to 20-minute interview with the Wall Street Journal Paul Ecke, III discussed Short Course, major events in the industry and the history of his family's company.

containers the company sells to larger chains. This is a different approach. Banner's first season with this program just ended, so time will tell how well it works.

Seeing Banner's situation brought up a point of contention — with so many larger growers taking over the box stores and gaining exclusivity within those stores (especially with pay-by-scan being implemented), how are the small- and mid-size growers going to stay in business and be successful? One idea a few of us had was marketing/merchandising; often, the smaller and mid-size growers focus on the quality of their product rather than the quantity, but the retailers need to know about the quality and uniqueness of their product. The garden center industry has been fighting this battle with consumers for a few years — independent garden centers carry the out-of-the-ordinary and higher-end product, while the boxes carry the staples. The independents are now focusing on that and marketing it, and the approach is starting to work. Hopefully it will do the same for Banner.

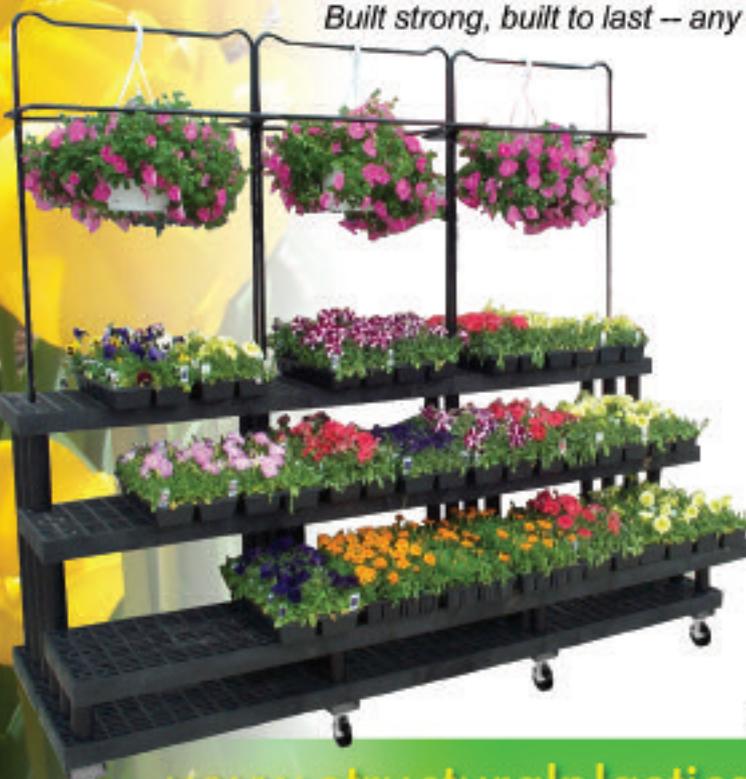
### OFA SHORT COURSE

OFA hosted its 76th annual Short Course this year in Columbus, Ohio. It is widely recognized as the premier event in U.S. floriculture and is the only event that draws a truly national and international attendance, both for its large trade show, as well as its extensive educational sessions.

With attendance nearing approximately 10,000 and nearly 1,330 trade show booths, OFA chalked up another successful year for its Short Course.

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GPN took advantage of Short Course to host a reception and recognize the GPN/Nexus Intern Award winner Jessica Boldt of the University of Florida (not pictured) and GPN/John Henry Company Creative Marketing Award winner Riverview Flower Farm (pictured are Dave and Rick Brown of Riverview flanking GPN's Carrie Burns).

Exhibitors were telling me and my fellow GPN editors that attendees came to the show ready to buy, and many exhibitors expressed their pleasure about the quality of leads they were getting.

Another interesting thing that happened on the trade show floor was the presence of our link to the consumer. The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) showed up to see what the action was all about at this year's show. A few companies and attendees took the time to share a little about how much impact Short Course has on the industry. I caught a glimpse of Paul Ecke III, CEO of Ecke Ranch, being interviewed and thought this is a great example of what our industry needs to be doing. We need to educate the public about how important we are and what we're all about. Kudos to WSJ for recognizing this.

Evaluations are already starting to come in, and the seminars at Short Course this year seem to be getting very high marks. While trying to run around and collect all of the show news for *The Daily Reader* on-site newsletter, we were able to attend some of the seminars. One session that seemed to catch everyone's attention was the Town Meeting; originally planned as a panel of growers to talk about pay-by-scan and energy, the Town Meeting ran into a few problems when some growers were asked by their customers to not participate in the pay-by-scan discussion. The topic, however, is so important and on everyone's mind, a few brave

souls got up there to talk about what they know. Now, I'm not saying "brave" because my boss, GPN's editorial director Bridget White, was up there; I'm saying "brave" because the discussion became somewhat heated, and many people shared their opin-

ions. But it turned out to be a very eye-opening, frank discussion about the pros and cons of pay-by-scan. Some don't want to accept that changes are happening, but they are.

If any of the above has you thinking about attending, next year will

is scheduled for June 21-24, 2006, and the OFA Short Course is scheduled for July 8-11, 2006. [GPN](#)

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