

# DeVroomen: 75 Years of Garden Joy

In 2000, DeVroomen Holland Garden Products celebrated its 75th anniversary. The company may have changed a lot over that time, but in many respects, this is still Grandfather De Vroomen's company.

By Bridget White



On the surface, Jack and Dick DeVroomen could not be more different. Carrying his cell phone and laptop computer, Jack typifies the modern businessman; and Dick, with his hand full of old photos, is the best part of a lifestyle we will never be able to achieve again. In many ways, looking at these two men is like seeing DeVroomen Holland Garden Products' past and future side-by-side.

The company has indeed gone through many changes over the past 75 years: from exclusively bulbs to 60/40 perennials/bulbs, from a small one-person business to a world-wide company that employs hundreds, from a man's desire to sell quality product to a man's desire to sell quality product.

That's right. For all the change that DeVroomen has undergone in its history and for all the difference between father and son, this company is still based on the same principles of quality product and quality service.

## THE PAST 75 YEARS

DeVroomen Holland Garden Products was started in the roaring '20s by Jacobus Theodorus de Vroomen (better known as Jac. Th de Vroomen), and the business name and logo still contain the autograph of the founder. Jacobus, grandfather to DeVroomen's current president Jack, developed a successful bulb growing and exporting company, based exclusively on quality products.

Jacobus traveled throughout Scandinavia searching for quality, unique bulbs and building partnerships with the people who grew them. When his sons, Ben, Hugo and Dick, came into the business, they expanded into the United States and Canada.

Dick took over the business in the '50s and founded the Russell, Ill. branch in 1961. The opening of this location sparked the use of



The history of DeVroomen is full of family photos like these.. Top: Dick and his young bride posed in the family's production fields. Bottom: Three generations of De Vroomens: Dick (left), grandson Oscar (center) and son Jack (right). All photos courtesy of DeVroomen Holland Garden Products.

temperature-controlled containers to optimize product quality; DeVroomen was among the first in the industry to use this innovation.

The introduction of the bare root perennial product line in the early '80s has become one of the most significant changes in the company's history. Over the past twenty years, DeVroomen has become the number one bare root perennial exporting company from Holland to the United States, also exporting large numbers of perennials to Canada, Asia, England and Scandinavia.

In 1990, Jack DeVroomen (the third generation) introduced the "Garden Joy" brand name into the market. And a few years later, upon Dick's retirement, Jack became president of the company.

## THE NEXT 75 YEARS

"If things go as far in the next 75 years as they have in the past," laughed Dick, "there's no telling where we will be. When I first started shipping bulbs to the States, I used to come over on the Holland-America Line with the bulbs because you couldn't get a regular flight. Now, we can ship plants from Holland to the customer in just a couple of days if we need to."

Part of change in DeVroomen's history has been the result of advancing technology, "changing with the times," but more recently, DeVroomen has been actively embracing modernization. In this respect, DeVroomen Holland Garden Products has been living its future for the past few years. Dick completely revamped the logistics at the Holland location about six years ago to modernize production. The company's first Web site was launched three years ago. Perennials have become approximately half of their business.





country within in just a few days. Plus, we have restock here, so if our customers didn't order enough of something, we can get that to them in just a couple of days."

"When I took over the company, one of the first things I did was update our shipping and ordering operations," continued Jack. We still have someone inspect each bulb or each plant before it ships, but we are now able to process the order more quickly and fill it more efficiently."

Shipping is extremely important to a company that grows the vast majority of its product in Holland and ships it to the United States.

All but the most tender plugs and bare root plants — those that can't handle being shipped — are produced in Holland. Thanks to mild summers, overcast skies and plenty of rain, the Dutch climate is excellent for perennial production. The rich, sandy soil of Holland also produces perennials with strong root systems that are easy to clean. These conditions,

combined with the low occurrence of disease in Holland, make tackling the shipping issue well worth the hassle.

Despite ideal growing conditions, Jack has no plans to brand the DeVroomen name. The company has been growing under his tenure, and should continue to do so, but only as a supplier of bulbs and plugs. As far as Jack is concerned, the bottom line is simple:

"Everyone needs to make money with their business," explained Jack. "The more our customers have a chance to make money, the better off we are. So, we've always looked at ways our customers can make more money. New crops are one way to do that. Marketing our existing crops with tags or POP materials is another."

"We don't have aspirations of

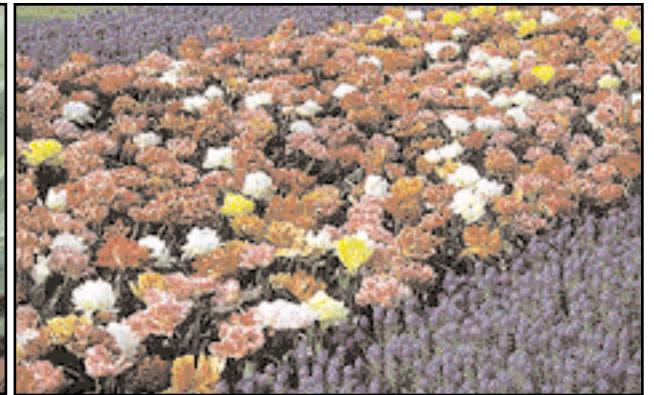
making DeVroomen a brand name," continued Jack. "For one thing, I don't think we're big enough. But more importantly, our customers want to put their name on the finished product. So, from our perspective, the most important thing we can do is form partnerships with growers, get commitments about next year's orders and grow good plants."

*Bridget White is managing editor for GPN.*



Headed by Jack, with help from Roland van den Bergh, DeVroomen is now a young company with an exciting retail marketing campaign, regular new introductions, extensive support materials and an understanding of the market.

"It's essential for us to have a full-service operation not only here in the States, but here in Illinois," explained Jack. "Because Illinois is pretty centrally located, we can get shipments to anywhere in the



1/2 Horizontal

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