

# Growing in Transition

Going into March 2020, our executive leadership team at Walters Gardens already had a lot going on. We were anticipating a year of what we then considered phenomenal growth thanks to Proven Winners. We had made some incredibly exciting strides toward transitioning the roles/tasks that my dad, John Walters (current CEO), had held for nearly 30 years to the next generation of Ryan Hop (COO and my cousin), Christa (Walters) Steenwyk (vice president of marketing and industry relations and my sister) and myself (vice president of product strategy).

No doubt, 2020 was going to be an exciting and challenging year. Sure, there were some murmurings and developments of COVID-19, but everyone was hoping it would be like the 2003 SARS outbreak, where it stayed localized to a few countries in Asia and the worry about a global pandemic ended up being overblown.

It's easy to ruefully laugh at our perceived naïveté because the COVID-19 pandemic took our definition of "challenging" and amplified it. We went from strategically planning our long-term future once a week to meeting daily and dealing almost exclusively with COVID-related problems.

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Are we going to lose sales? Do we stay open? Do we require masks (this was before the state/national requirements)? A seemingly never-ending barrage of unique problems not related to the business prevented us from planning for the future. For about three months, it was just about staying in business, staying healthy and keeping our heads above water.

What I can be grateful for is that Walters Gardens was one of the fortunate ones, in that the stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions were a boon for us in the perennial market. The 2020-2021 season was a record-shattering one for us —



beating our previous annual sales increase by more than double. Additionally, on a personal note, I did not experience the level of isolation others in the world have faced since I shared my “bubble” with my dad, Ryan and Christa.

Being able to make those COVID-19 decisions as a team of four unified us. I won't say that we don't have our disagreements on issues, but learning to navigate a scary and stressful time as a team prepared us for future decisions. I love being part of a team because you have a combination of a sounding board, relying on others' strengths where it may not be your specialty — and even mini-therapy sessions for stressful days. I can't imagine it any other way.

We are grateful to be back in forward-thinking, strategic-planning mode with many exciting ideas for revamping and improving our 75-year-old family business. This will help us either ride the tailwinds of a great market or weather the headwinds of the next crisis. My dad, trusting the three of us at the helm, is looking forward to stepping back but still being involved in the business.

Thanks to GPN for the incredible honor of being a 40 Under 40 recipient for 2021. Ryan was recognized in 2020 and Christa in 2019, so we now have a rockstar team of GPN-approved leadership.

Congratulations to the Class of 2022! [gpn](#)



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