

They go to work
in a lush, green forest
Their aim is to make
all offices a bit like
the whole earth...



Tropics bloom under glass

By ALICE COLLINS

Last week some scientists decided it was time to take a public stand against a widespread belief that people and plants communicate and relate to each other.

It just isn't so, said Dr. Arthur W. Galston, professor of biology at Yale and one of several scientists challenging the plant-people theory at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New York.

The scientists acknowledged that plants generate voltages that are influenced by things in the environment like gravity, light and temperature. But when it comes to responding to the soft voice of a friendly caretaker, they say it isn't possible.

Obviously everyone doesn't go along with the word of Galston and his associates.

At the new Planterra Greenhouse in Troy, Larry Pliska relaxes and plays his flute to thousands of varieties of cacti and tropical plants and says he experiences good communication and harmony with them.

"I can look at a plant and feel the great peacefulness within it. I believe there's a spiritual level in dealing with them."

Pliska, Steve George and Andre Bond, all Birmingham men in their mid 20s, opened Planterra Greenhouse at 6550 Coolidge Highway last August. The firm sells exotic tropical plants and claims to have the largest selection of cacti in the Midwest.

"We have more than 2,000 varieties of cacti ranging from two to 30 inches in height, and from 99 cents to \$30 in price," Pliska said.

The most expensive item in the greenhouse is a 14-foot, 80-year-old "pony tail palm tree," also commonly called elephant foot tree. It sells for \$800. "We also have tropical plants for 65 cents," he added.

Planterra is one acre under glass. "It's a unique environment," Pliska said. "You have to come in to experience the full aesthetics. It's like being in the tropics, birds and all."

Pliska said their plants come from South America, Arizona, California, Florida, Puerto Rico, from all over. We go to these places and hand pick them. We even have carnivorous plants.

"We never sell a plant to a person unless we're convinced it will live in that particular house. After all, plants aren't just decorations, they're living things. They can't be taken for granted," Pliska continued.

The greenhouse now occupied by Planterra was built in the 1920s and has been vacant for seven years. "We spent the end of the summer remodeling," he said.

They actually started their business in January of 1974. "We rented a greenhouse on a private estate in Bloomfield Hills. But it was a residential area and the neighbors more or less chased us out because we got too busy," he added.



Larry Pliska at work



The new 'downtowns'?

Small mall concept still thrives

By SANDY TESSLER

The success of the suburban supermall concept has given rise to the mini-mall. Miniature in detail, the smaller malls are more unique in flavor.

Essentially, a mini-mall is created when the landlord obtains a large existing older building, freshens it up and sub-divides it, thus providing space for many tenants where only one formerly existed.

The mini-mall provides pluses for the landlord, the tenant and the customer.

Tony Brown, owner of "The Little Mall" in Rochester, (once a car dealership) noted that basically the landlord has a potential for drawing more rent from a number of small tenants

than from merely one. Also in this uncertain economic climate, Brown noted that if a tenant does go under, replacement is not so difficult.

ALTHOUGH BROWN acknowledged that the landlord has more responsibilities for maintenance with multiple tenants, he didn't hesitate to point out that he was already involved in converting an old Kresge building in Dearborn into yet another mall.

Dennis Snell, owner of "Your House Plants" in Brown's mall, has the dual advantage of being located in a mall and having Main Street frontage. Snell termed the mall concept with its walk-in customer traffic a built-in feature, "definitely advantageous" to the small business owner.

Besides the draw of other shops, advantages to renters include the facts that one rents no more space than is needed, there is a minimal initial investment ("just some counters and carpeting" according to Brown), joint payment of advertising and utility bills reduces costs, and tenant associations provide clout.

THE GRANDDADDY and most successful of the suburban malls is the eight-year old Continental Market in Birmingham.

Customers come here from as far away as Flint and Saginaw to select unusual foods and imported products from the ten shops.

Harold Anderson, a Birmingham real estate firm partner is a general partner of the investors, manager, and originator of the Continental Market.

Originally Anderson came up with the mall idea to provide an interesting shopping area where a Frank's Nursery was standing. The purpose was to make the property across the street more saleable.

Anderson says he got the idea from Detroit's Broadway Market.

"The town (Birmingham) has been good to me," said Anderson. By providing a continental background for the sale of merchandise too unusual for department stores to handle, Anderson feels he is aiding all of Birmingham.

He modestly mentioned that while the Market is not losing money, he keeps rent to a minimum.

Soon an eight-story apartment building will be erected where the Conti-

ental Market now stands with the mall's tenants moving into the first floor.

IN SOUTHFIELD, Robbie Friedman, owner of Firemill Village Mall on Northwestern Highway and proprietor of "Cosmic Circus" there, explained his difficulties in promoting a new image.

"At first the mall attracted a lot of hippies."

"You could say it's a reflection of me. When I first opened it, I was 22 and into recycled jeans. Now I'm 27 and I'm carrying quality designer clothes," Friedman said.

From the original "hippie" image, Friedman has become "an ordinary American capitalist" who honors BankAmericard and Diner's Club.

Still, because of the nature of the other shops, his clientele varies from young long-haired to suburban ladies of means. This points up an important aspect of owning a mall: selecting shops which compliment one another and being very particular about it.

THE FARMINGTON Village Mall, an old bank building, contains many of the more conventional shops. Like all mini-malls, it attracts customers who want to shop in a personal, friendly atmosphere.

Deanna Dault, manager of Helen's Health Hut, was there two-and-a-half years ago when the mall first opened and she has already expanded the shop to include street frontage. For her a mall was the only way.

"I wouldn't have a free-standing store," she affirmed. Noting that at



Village Mall in Farmington

first she couldn't otherwise have found a place small enough and yet couldn't have afforded one larger, she gratefully acknowledged, as she echoed the sentiments of all mall tenants:

"I couldn't have started any other way."

The conversion of older, sometimes white elephant buildings to mini-malls has been attractive at least in part because the rentals work out at a premium.

Brown says he charges considerably more per square foot than the going rate in Rochester. An individual tenant would still probably be ahead because of the shared costs of overhead and promotion, combined with leasing only the space actually used.

Other landlords confirmed the premium rates, justifying them because of the money spent on partitioning and the floor space lost compared to a more conventional floor plan.



Little Mall in Rochester