



Popping up in a sea of poinsettias, Darrell Bordine rearranges the traditional Christmas plant on one of the 'fully automatic' benches he invented.

NURSERIES: *They're busy gearing up for when the frost breaks*

By NANCY KASSEN LIESE

Being in business in these economic times can be precarious. To survive, stores often must offer something special to attract and hold valuable customers.

With four nurseries in and around Rochester, specializing in a full-time job, each nursery professes to offer a unique service for the public.

The oldest, largest, and perhaps best-known to the area is the 35-year-old landmark on Rochester Road—Bordine's. A family-owned-and-operated nursery, Bordine's has been running a successful business on its 25 acres since Darrell Bordine bought his first greenhouse there in 1939.

The son of a Milan dairy farmer, Bordine bought the greenhouse because he had a wife and family to support. Now white-haired and approaching 70, Bordine still runs the operation with his son, Bruce.

TRYING TO KEEP in touch with the entire business, he often rides around from greenhouse to store to nursery in a golf cart labeled "Mr. B."

When he started the nursery he hoped to clear \$5,000 a year above living expenses. That he did, multiplying the gross yearly.

Today his entire retail and wholesale operation can take in more than \$68,000 "on a peak day."

Bordine never had a proficiency for

algebra or school, but he has done his own engineering for years. He constantly looks for ways to improve his business, he said. His latest invention, a self-watering bench for plants, will "possibly revolutionize the industry," he said.

The six-by-36-foot benches are built on a slight angle toward the center, allowing water to drip from the plants into a center tub.

Each morning a rubber hose automatically refills the bench, watering the plants. Later, the benches drain, leaving the plants dry.

The system, once in operation, will save Bordine approximately \$50,000 a year by replacing the employees who now water the plants by hand, he said.

He plans to pass on that savings to customers, he added, giving them a share of his profit.

BORDINE REFUSES to work at his business year round, insisting on six or eight weeks per year of travel.

"You make more money if you get out and see how others do things," he said, justifying his around-the-world jaunts.

"The important thing is that this is the largest and most modern greenhouse in the world," Bordine said. He claimed his nursery offers plants not found anywhere else.

Among those plants are four varieties of Christmas cactus, one of which Bordine has franchised, and three of

which are varieties of the Hoya, which Bordine called the best plant for indoor gardeners.

Another nursery with an equally familiar name but an entirely different approach from Bordine's, is the new Frank's Nursery and Trims, which opened last March at the Meadow Brook Village Mall.

Located at the east end of the mall at the corner of Walton and Adams, Frank's was described by Albert Bernstein, the company's vice-president of marketing, as "a mass-merchandiser in the horticulture field."

"We don't do any planting (or landscape) designing," he said, adding that the nursery does try to offer plants at "the lowest price with the highest quality."

Working "supermarket style," Frank's specializes in three things, Bernstein said—nursery, crafts and Christmas.

Frank's has a total of 54 stores in five midwestern states. Last year those 54 stores grossed about \$52 million, with \$22 million of that from the Detroit area.

FRANK'S MANAGER Joe Bellanca estimated the Avon Township store would gross almost \$1 million for its first nine months.

The Avon store is one of Frank's largest—30,000 square feet—Bellanca said. Two-thirds of the store is devoted to nursery and the rest to crafts.

Crafts are the store's biggest sellers, Bellanca said, until the spring plants are brought out in March. By April the store is stocked with a huge supply of flowering annuals and plants for Easter and Mother's Day.

One thing Frank's has done, according to another nursery owner, is to make nurseries "respectable," Bellanca said. "We've made nurseries a family affair."

Entire families come to the store, he said, looking for the right trees to surround their homes. Although the store does not have a design service, it will answer questions about the best trees to use in certain areas, Bellanca said, and will help in coordinating the landscape.

One month after Frank's opened its doors, a third landscaping company started on 10 acres of land on Auburn Road. Located between Crooks and Livernois, Zendi's Landscaping Co. is a branch of a firm begun in Mount Clemens. The nursery is now covered now and hard to spot, but the company has been open for business since April.

PLANS FOR THE SITE, according to manager Joe Burnard, include a retail store, 3½ acres for retail nursery sales, including "information gardens," built in different motifs to allow customers to visualize their new gardens.

Burnard, who worked for Bordine's for more than 10 years, said Zendi's is a "full-service" company catering to all customers' needs. Services include designing and planting and a promise of help from any employee.

"If you just have a question we'll answer it," Burnard said. "If we can't help you then we'll tell you where to go to get help."



Sherwood's nursery yard is closed until spring, but the owners are working—traveling across the country to find the best in shrubbery.

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More than anything, Zendi's will be "a decent, honorable company, because that's what people are looking for," Burnard said.

Zendi's has already completed one commercial project in Avon Township—the new addition to Stoney Creek cemetery on Tenken. For that project Zendi's used a new seeding process which allows the seed to adhere to the ground and grow faster. The process combines the seed with mulch for greater consistency.

Along with Zendi's, Bordine's and Frank's, there is now a fourth landscaping company in the area. Sherwood Landscaping, owned by two brothers and two associates, also opened on Adams near Silverbell last spring.

SHERWOOD ORIGINALLY started in Grosse Pointe three years ago. Last year the owners, Bill and Dwight Thomas, Joe Springer and Richard Crawford, started the store on Adams in Oakland Township.

Right now, Sherwood's is closed for the winter. It will reopen in March. The owners use the time off in the winter like Darrell Bordine uses his vacation—traveling around looking for the best plants.

"We like to do quality work. In winter we travel around the country trying to find the best trees. We like to design something that will look nice and increase the value," Bill Thomas said.

The philosophy at Sherwood is that "landscaping enhances the aesthetic value of the environment," he added. To insure that, the company has a landscape architect, Bill Wood, on hand.

Dwight Thomas also does landscaping work but is not a registered architect. Both he and Springer have taken landscape design and construction courses at Macomb Community College, and Bill Thomas is working on a horticulture degree from Michigan State.

The type of work Sherwood's does can be seen at Avon Township condominium developments King's Cove and Hidden Hills, and the Great Oaks West subdivision.

Sherwood was also responsible for the landscaping of Oakland University's Glyndebourne Picnic last year. For that project the brothers worked two days landscaping the main entrance and dance floor in a Victorian theme.



Zendi's general manager Joe Burnard clears away snow from one of the rock gardens that will be fully displayed next summer.



Frank's doesn't do any home planting or landscape design. But it does carry most of what is necessary to 'do it yourself.'