

Plant lover finds challenge in greenhouse work

By KATHY PARKER

The building is 75 years old, attached to a greenhouse that's already seen its 40th birthday.

So it's just about due for a facelift, according to Harold Siewert, proprietor of Rochester Greenhouse. He's planning on turning his greenhouse into a jungle.

"It's something I've wanted to do for a long time," Siewert says. "I hope it will be like a conservatory—all green plants, small, large, all sizes, all price ranges."

"Green plants are so refreshing—they give you life."

After 17 years in the same building—first as an employee, then a partner, then a full owner, Siewert has grown to appreciate the small, cozy atmosphere of his store. Arrangements, corsages, nosegays and bouquets are put together in a rear room; fresh flowers and small houseplants color the storefront.

"I have a small store and I like it this way," he said. "It's an older building, and it seems less commercial. It makes people feel at home. I've been here a long time and my customers are my friends, too."

SIEWERT HAS lived in Rochester since 1935. His father was a horticulturist for the Newberrys of Grosse Pointe before coming to the Meadow Brook farm as superintendent.

"I just naturally picked up horticulture from him," Siewert says. "There are so many different phases to this profession, and I like them all. There was never a time when I wanted to do anything else. Everything is a challenge."

Some of the work was more challenging when he first started out, Siewert said. Technology and changing public tastes in greenery and flowers have altered the picture radically.

"Arrangements never used to be as easy to make," he said. "Years ago, we used all chicken wire to hold the arrangement together. That was really hard on your hands, and very time-consuming."

"Now we use oasis and hydrofoam. It's so much easier."

People no longer care for the "mas-

sive arrangements" of the past, he said, but now prefer simpler designs that can be displayed on coffee tables and small furniture pieces.

"People still like spring flowers, but tastes have expanded," he said, while putting together an arrangement of anemone, a red heart-shaped Hawaiian flower with a long "nose." The arrangement, he said, will stay fresh for two weeks.

ROSES NOW stay fresh and fragrant for a week, he said. Years ago they lasted only one or two days. But there still is a preference for the fleeting beauty of daisies, daffodils and other spring flowers whose lifespan is less than a week, Siewert said.

"Even personalities have changed," he said. "It used to be that they wilted before the Christmas season was over. Now people complain because they last so long."

The popularity of hanging plants as home decor helped spur his plans for a greenhouse expansion, Siewert said.

"People are definitely drawn toward hanging plants and house plants of all kinds now, particularly the hardy types that don't need too much attention," he said. "Besides, the hardy plants live longer and, I think, greenery adds a touch of freshness to any room."

He plans to stock "everything I can get my hands on," including many different kinds of cacti, Swedish and grape ivy, spider plants and philodendron. He also hopes to offer a variety of more unusual plants for the greenery connoisseurs.

Although the increased public "consumption" of house plants has increased competition in the greenery business, Siewert says he's not concerned.

"EACH PERSON who runs a flower shop or greenhouse has his own clientele," Siewert said. "We don't consider each other 'competition,' since we draw our customers from all over the county. Every store has something a little different to offer."

In addition to running Rochester Greenhouse, Siewert has a flower concession at Pine Knob and one at Pontiac Stadium, which he began several

years ago "just because people like flowers no matter where they are."

"The first couple years, I just barely broke even," he said. "But it's really a fun thing, when guys bring their girls to a game and buy flowers along with the program. Most of the girls hold those flowers for the whole game." Now, he said, the flowers are usually gone before the game is over.

"I like flowers, and I think other people should, too," he said. "It's a very interesting profession, because

you're always making people happy. Flowers make people happy."

His three sons—Dean, 18, Paul, 16 and Mark, 14—help out in the store during the busy periods such as Christmas and Mother's Day. But, Siewert said, he's neither encouraging or discouraging their interest in horticulture.

"What youngsters want to do with their lives is something they should decide for themselves," he said. "As for me, it's my life and I love it."



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"Green plants are so refreshing—they give you life," says Harold Siewert.

Imagine yourself immersed in this 'fish bowl'

By SUSAN TAUBER KLEIN

Walking into a shop that sells live fish can be like immersing yourself in a fish bowl. Whole environments are created in aquariums on display.

The owner of a tropical fish store must be more than just appreciative of the colorful, cold-blooded animals. He must also be part biologist, part naturalist, part ichthyologist (one who studies fish) and part business person. Robert Overall, owner of Sea and Sky in Rochester, also noted that when you work in a room with 68 tanks, as he does, you've got to be able to withstand the humidity caused by the evaporating water.

The success of a fish store depends on the bait—a variety of fish and equipment.

"Fish aren't really pets," said Overall. "People buy them for a hobby, for a collection. Many buy fish for decoration."

The most popular species at Sea and Sky are goldfish, neons and angel fish. Finding many species to sell is often difficult and can be a hit or miss proposition, said Overall.

"SOMETIMES certain fish are plentiful, sometimes they're not."

Especially hard to get, said Overall, is the Emerald Cichlid. Commonly known as the "green terror," this beautiful, multi-colored green and aqua spotted fish comes from the fresh waters of Ecuador.

They are collected by natives and taken to a central shipping place, where the fish are sold to dealers who



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sell them to store buyers, said Overall. Store merchants buy aquarium fish from all five continents. Some fish can be bred in aquariums.

Which species must be purchased and which can be bred is something the shopowner must know. Much of this, and other necessary information, is learned from reading books, talking to other fish owners and from experience.

"It's experience that taught me what fish species can live with what other species. I keep docile fish together in the same tank. Some fish are so aggressive that they have to be separated from others, even those of the same species," Overall said.

It was experience that taught him piranhas aren't as fierce as their reputation. They bite only if handled.

"The most aggressive fish is the two-spotted fish. It's less than two inches long but will tear up another fish 10 times its size. Yet it does nothing to people. It will eat food off your fingers."

OVERALL thinks fish are popular because they don't require much care.

"You don't have to take them on a walk. You can ignore them, even forget to feed them for a couple of days and they'll be okay. They are rather hardy creatures."

People enjoy watching fish for their

seemingly restful nature. However, fish are busy creatures. They are constantly in search of food and sexual partners, and are concerned with protecting their territory. If they aren't territorial, they concentrate on swimming with their group.

Overall said eating habits vary with species.

"Some eat five to six times a day. Some are voracious eaters and grab the food as soon as it's put into the tank. Others are delicate eaters and wait until the food floats down. Others are pigs and eat constantly."

Fish aren't smart. Only a couple species have brains they use. The elephant fish from the African Congo has a brain the same proportion to its body as a human's body-brain proportion.

Often, stores that sell live fish also sell other animals. Sea and Sky has hamsters and pet birds for sale.

BUT FOR Overall, fish are the main attraction. He's been interested in them since his father, Ted, owned a tropical fish store in Highland Park in the early 1930s. Overall's brother also has a tropical fish store.

Overall still likes fish, even after being involved with them all these years.

"I still get a kick out of feeding them," he said.



Whole environments are created in aquarium displays.

Policeman fills off-duty time in creative world

By KATHY PARKER

With the many different types of arts, crafts and handmade goodies stored in Rochester, what's one thing that's missing?

Lloyd Johnson thinks he has the answer to that question—and also an innovative means of getting to the solution.

He opened "Innovative Arts and Crafts of Rochester" at 429 Walnut, in what was formerly the Needlepoint Book, and added a new twist: Selling quality handcrafted items on consignment.

"There are so many talented people in Rochester; that's evident," says Johnson, who also is a Rochester police officer entering his 14th year on the force. "I think this idea is ripe and ready. Although I own the store, I want my customers to feel that this is their place."

To achieve that end, he is instituting some new ideas: free consultation for customers troubled with difficult needlepoint stitches, music, coffee and a relaxed atmosphere.

All he really needs now, he says, are residents with quality, handmade items they wish to sell on consignment. The items should be small

enough to be movable, of good craftsmanship and priced to sell, he says.

"WE WANT it to be unique, different, attractive and colorful," Johnson says. "Dollmaking, ceramics, leatherwork, rugs, needlepoint, woodwork, macramé—anything that's classified as an art or a craft."

The shop will have tight inventory control to encourage turnover, with a three-month stocking period. All items will be sold or returned at the end of the three months, he says.

He already has consulted with Mary Lee Kowalczyk of Rochester Community House, and will help set up classes in needlework there. The Rochester-Avon Recreation Authority senior citizens program, Oakland University, Oakland Community College and other service and civic organizations are expected to contribute to the consignment process.

"Handmade items are always better, nicer, than something from a production line," Johnson says. "And, with all the artists and craftsmen in Rochester, there's really very few places they can go to sell their work on consignment. There is nowhere they can go in the city. At least, there was nowhere until this shop opened."

He encourages those interested to bring their work to the store, since "you really can't tell what someone has to offer until you see it."

JOHNSON HAS about 600 square feet of display space in the store, and will remodel and add shelving and racks to accommodate the consignment items.

In the needlepoint area, the shop will offer another innovation—a "trade-to-suit" canvas.

"All we need is a photograph, and the reproduction can be done several ways," he says. "Then, you can have a canvas and an artwork that is uniquely yours. There will be none other like it."

The canvases come in varying degrees of "fineness," he says, and "the finer the canvas, the finer the detail. It all depends on what the customer prefers."

Painted, preprinted and blank canvases for needlepoint are still available at the store, as well as the yarn and other crafts materials. Blocking and finishing of canvases are also available services.

For further information on the consignment procedure, call Johnson or store manager Shirley Burnham at 651-5764.



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