



Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile

Leonard Schroeder, Owner

Bloomers Home & Garden Center, Washington Township, NJ

Bloomers Home & Garden Center Exemplifies Strong Family Legacy in Horticulture



For the Schroeder family, a deeply rooted history in horticulture blossomed into a decades-strong independent garden center, Bloomers Home & Garden Center, located in Washington Township, NJ. Voted “Best Garden Center” several years in a row by local and regional residents, Bloomers began as most businesses do – as a spark of ingenuity and passion.

Owner Leonard “Len” Schroeder is proud of his family’s background, as he tells the story of his grandmother’s Great Depression-era farm market that sold fruits and vegetables grown right on their homestead. His parents took over the stand after building credibility, bringing in more plants and transforming it into a structured garden center.

With a garden center of his own, opened in 1988 with his high school sweetheart, Debra, Len works to uphold his family’s horticultural reputation and differentiate their legacy by appealing to the shopping habits and expected conveniences of today’s consumer.

“Our mission is to service the region as an independent garden center and to have our customers be confident enough to try new things in the garden,” he says.



The first step, according to Len, is to provide each and every customer with regional knowledge so they have great success in the garden. And updating shoppers on local gardening tips keeps Bloomers relevant and valuable in their eyes.

“We’ve got to remain viable in the eyes of the consumer, and that comes from getting legitimate, regional information that can be utilized for their yards,” Len says. “So many people come in with misinformation from online, where they’re looking for the wrong plants because they saw them on a website. Regional information is the most important thing.”



Len has found a way to distribute regional gardening tips that simultaneously establishes his store’s reputation for gardening expertise in the local community. Started in September, Len co-hosts a gardening program every Saturday morning on Philadelphia’s WWDB TALK 860 and ESPN 610 AM radio stations alongside co-worker Julio Zamora. The

program lasts about an hour, and focuses on topics submitted by listeners or collected from Bloomers’ website.

To appeal to those shoppers who love convenience, Bloomers has a mobile app that not only acts as a reward program, it also doubles as a hub for gardening information, store deals and grilling recipes. Since birding is a popular hobby in the area, the garden retailer also runs a Bird Feeders Club that awards members with a \$10 coupon toward any birding supplies in their Bird Sanctuary department after so many purchases.

Len believes his well-trained, knowledgeable staff has a huge hand in creating the unique in-store experience at Bloomers. In order to keep his associates up-to-date in all products, they host a staff meeting every Thursday night March through May. The mandatory meetings cover a wide variety of topics to improve every person’s sales technique, including salesmanship, store policies, product knowledge and vendor talks.

Len wants his employees to be equipped with as much information as possible to help and inform the customer. “Our best management tool is something called, ‘STP: Solve the Problem,’” he says. “We give our employees the authority and training to be able to make decisions on the spot, so a customer gets an answer quickly.”



Keeping up with the latest garden product innovations and retailing, Len and his staff attend the IGC Show in Chicago. “The IGC Show feeds the retail aspect of our business,” he says. “It changes your view of what you do, from just a job to a whole industry that’s associated with it.”

Creating Their Own Adventure

Stepping away from the garden center that his family started, Len and Debra decided to open their own garden store. After months and months of searching, as well as a few disappointing site tours, they finally landed on the property in Washington Township. “We still have the same ad where Debbie wrote her notes on it,” he says.



After 30 years, Bloomers has grown into the 3-acre property, making its original Quonset greenhouse a Bird Sanctuary filled with birding supplies and adding more Nexus gutter-connected greenhouses for hardgoods, houseplants, organic and regular vegetables, bedding plants and seasonal color plants.

The main retail building is dedicated to “the lifestyle of barbeque,” according to Len, who lists Traeger grills, Weber grills and a full line of Stonewall Kitchen products among the selection. Patio furniture, home decor, a full pond department, bulk materials and pottery round out the store’s offerings.

Bloomers features plenty of services to assist customers, such as the Plant Rx section for shoppers to diagnose ailments, pests and other problems plaguing their gardens. They offer full plant delivery, as well as a planting service, for those “do-it-for-me” customers. For the more ambitious DIY shoppers, they can request a free in-store landscape design to help map out their gardens and landscapes.

The extensive services Bloomers offers aren’t the only elements contributing to a memorable in-store experience – special themed events and weekends keep shoppers entertained and coming back to the store frequently.

“Our Christmas Open House is probably our largest-attended event,” Len says. “We try to make it an adult event, with wine tasting, live music from a barbershop quartet and hors d’oeuvres.”

Fueled by a long family history in horticulture and a passion for gardening, Len and his team at Bloomers carefully navigate the complicated era of garden retailing by appealing to today’s consumer with decades of plant expertise, modern conveniences, a weekly radio program, extensive product selection and fun in-store events.

