



Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile

Josh Skarzenski, Vice President, Stan's Garden Center, Erie, PA

Smart Changes Keep Stan's On Top of Its Game



Josh Skarzenski isn't "just coasting" on his family garden center's 60-year reputation as the area's best resource for quality annuals and perennials. As Vice President of Stan's Garden Center in Erie, PA, he constantly seeks out change to improve, realizing the business needs to keep moving forward to stay ahead of the curve. "I'm a changer. Some people like to go to the same place for coffee every single day - I'm not like that," he says. "I'm not one of those people stuck in my own little world in a corner somewhere, doing the same thing over and over again. I've gone on numerous GCA tours. I get out there."

Inspiration and education are important to keep his retail and growing business current, Josh says, and he finds both from

GCA and its summer bus tours. "It helps to look at other people's markets and see what they're selling and what they're not selling to stay in the game," he says. "I've become much more enlightened from GCA because I've made 30 friends in the industry who I constantly network with."

Taking what he has learned as a result of GCA, Josh says Stan's has benefited from a retail redesign. "We put five registers on POS, took walls out to improve the flow, turned displays - our retail layout has been completely redesigned," he says.

The GCA Summer Tour also helps the growing side of the business. "If I see somebody who's doing things differently, I'm not afraid to steal those ideas," he says. "It's a very fickle market sometimes. What's hot one day, isn't the next. The tours help me stay on top of what to grow. It's about staying on top of demand."

Josh is constantly building upon the legacy of his grandfather, Stan Skarzenski, and the garden center has grown from it. "In the last four years, we've changed our business model to start satellite stores. Now we have seven locations, some of which are seasonal," he says.



Trends for All Ages

Stan's makes its name on plant quality and selection, says Josh. Since it grows 99 percent of the green goods it sells, the garden center is in the position to tightly control the quality and quantity of its offerings. "Our enormous selection keeps our reputation at the top," he says. "In just one series of our geraniums, there are about 17 colors. We grow 60,000 geraniums in all."

Stan's takes requests for hard-to-find plants, too. When a customer is trying to find a certain plant without success, Josh will grow it. "That reputation of going the extra mile has helped us stay on top."

The garden center also benefits from strategies gained through GCA that improve the shopping experience for its target customer base, middle-aged to mature women. "Recently, we expanded our entrance by 35 parking places, and it's entirely to make it easier for our customer base to get in and out of the parking lot and find a parking place," says Josh. "It was GCA that said it is \$10,000 per parking space in revenue per year that is generated when you add spaces."

Josh is also seeing growth in categories that appeal to younger generations. The veggie gardening and green living trends are attracting 20-somethings to Stan's. "Edibles have definitely gained a lot of momentum with customers in their late 20s and up," he says. "It has grown our customer base. More and more each year, I get newlyweds coming in and planting their first garden."

A trend that has taken Josh by surprise is the growth of fairy gardening. "We jumped on the bandwagon a couple of years ago, and it has been unreal for us," he says. "I had a fairy gardening workshop where 20 people signed up - and 55 people showed up. I did \$5,000 gross revenue in fairy gardens in an hour and a half. I don't know where it came from, but it's promising because the hope is these little kids will end up lifelong gardeners."

