

## Retired Couple Establishes Agricultural Business

(Continued from Page A1)

design, retail nursery, and ponds and waterscaping.

The Wizar (pronounced *Wizer*) live in a stone farmhouse they remodeled that was part of the 40-acre farm parcel they bought at public auction in 1985.

Sandra said that after the the auction, her mother cried all the way back home to Middletown. She explained that was because the Wizar had lived in a very nice, single family modern home and her mother was concerned that her daughter and son-in-law wouldn't be living as well.

That has changed. The Wizar have worked to create a home that is now a showplace.

From the Wizar's porch that faces away from traffic, the couple has a broad view of their picturesque, several-acre wetlands and pond, and a stream that courses between the wetlands and the house.

They can also see a long greenhouse that sits between the stream and the wetlands, and, closer to the house, a screened pavillion and swimming pool. On the far side of the pavillion is lawn and a tall, old sycamore.

Beyond the wetlands is an overgrown fenceline, and then beyond that are other people's crop fields. Traditional farmland adjoins the property almost on all sides.

A narrow road divides the property between the house and where the main business activity takes place.

The business area consists of a red-painted, rennovated bankbarn with a closed system aquaculture facility and offices; barn-red painted outbuildings for the nursey and landscaping business; a nursey area with demonstration and work areas; and a Christmas tree-raising area that remains from their gradual phase-out from that highly competitive, low margin business.

The road that bisects the property is a section of Spangler Road — a winding, walnut tree-lined secondary road with little through-traffic, though their operation is visible from the very busy Rt. 322.

In the spring, large flocks of snow geese, whistling swans, ducks and other types of geese and waterfowl stop at the wetlands and in adjacent fields.



The upper of end of a manmade wetland is in the foreground of this landscape photograph of Wizar's Country Nursery in Lebanon County. Retired from Bell Atlantic, Richard and Sandra Wizar live in the rennovated stone farmhouse and have created a multi-faceted nursey and landscaping supplies and design business on 40 acres. The Wizar constructed the wetland through a federal cost-sharing program, and with the help of Ducks Unlimited.

Other waterfowl nest there.

The sight of their swirling flocks coming in and landing on the shallow pond and wetlands attracts attention from motorists on Rt. 322. Some bring video cameras to the Wizar to document the flights of birds and the scenery.

A business sign along Rt. 322 informs those in automobiles that Wizar's Country Nursery is down that road that leads closer to where all the birds are going.

The local public's knowledge of the business has grown quickly, not only because of the obvious change of a low-lying farm field into an open-water wetlands, but from other landscapers, customers, and from word-of-mouth among backyard pond enthusiasts.

In the aquaculture facility that he built inside the stall area of the bankbarn, Richard raises several hundred Koi (a strain of fancy goldfish that come in a variety of colors and tailshapes that have long been bred in Asia and more recently in the United States for outdoor pond aesthetics).

He buys them young and raises them to size, and while most take

months to raise — like feeding out a hog for market — some customers desire larger, older fish and that can take years to raise.

Richard said he imports some fish from Japan and Israel and the others he buys from domestic breeders.

Later this year, he intends to expand from only retailing the fish to wholesaling some.

The fact that the couple has developed an apparently successful business is testament that background and experience in production agriculture are not the telling factors in whether a person can be successful or not.

In the Wizar's case, Richard grew up in the nearby mining village of Burd Coleman.

The historic Cornwall Iron Mine was a major employer in the area until Hurricane Agnes struck the region in 1972 and the operations was shut down after it was determined to be not worthwhile to pumpout and repair to working order.

Lots of equipment remains at depths unreachable by scuba divers.

Likewise, the jobs and lifestyles of the miners were also deep-sixed.

Some mine workers retired early, others were offered jobs elsewhere, while still others had to search for new careers. A few lingered in maintenance and security

operations. Richard's father was a miner, though Richard was out and on his own before the flood shut down the mine.

Sandra grew up living with her parents on her grandparents' farm in the rural Middletown area.

She said growing up on the farm she did have regular chores, depending on what kinds of livestock her grandparents were raising at the time.

They did subsistence farming and gardening. Her grandfather was a carpenter by trade. Sandra said she pulled a lot of weeds.

While growing up, Richard said he worked a couple of summers going around the county as a laborer baling and stacking hay, but that was the extent of his agricultural background.

He has two year's worth of college studying economics, and he attended Penn State University, and Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster.

Other than that, he has on-the-job training at Bell Atlantic.

He worked as a manager of the long-range planning department in technology planning with a research group that was part of Bell Laboratories.

Over the years he became educated on technology and how to implement it.

"But I'm not mechanically inclined," he said.

Without that mechanical inclination, he nevertheless manages to be somewhat expert on pond systems, water filters, low head pumps, and irrigation equipment.

With the help of Penn State Cooperative Extension, he also learned about market conditions, plant cultivation, care, diseases, treatments, soil conditions, soil fertility, and some other matters important to raising Christmas tree, landscaping and nursery stock.

While aquaculture still remains the unclaimed child of Pennsylvania agriculture (proposed legislation that would change its legal status and thus allow aquaculture operators the same considerations as livestock and crop agriculture failed to be approved last session and a new, similar version is currently sitting in the Senate Appropriations Committee awaiting further consideration), Richard said it is becoming more and more important to the business.

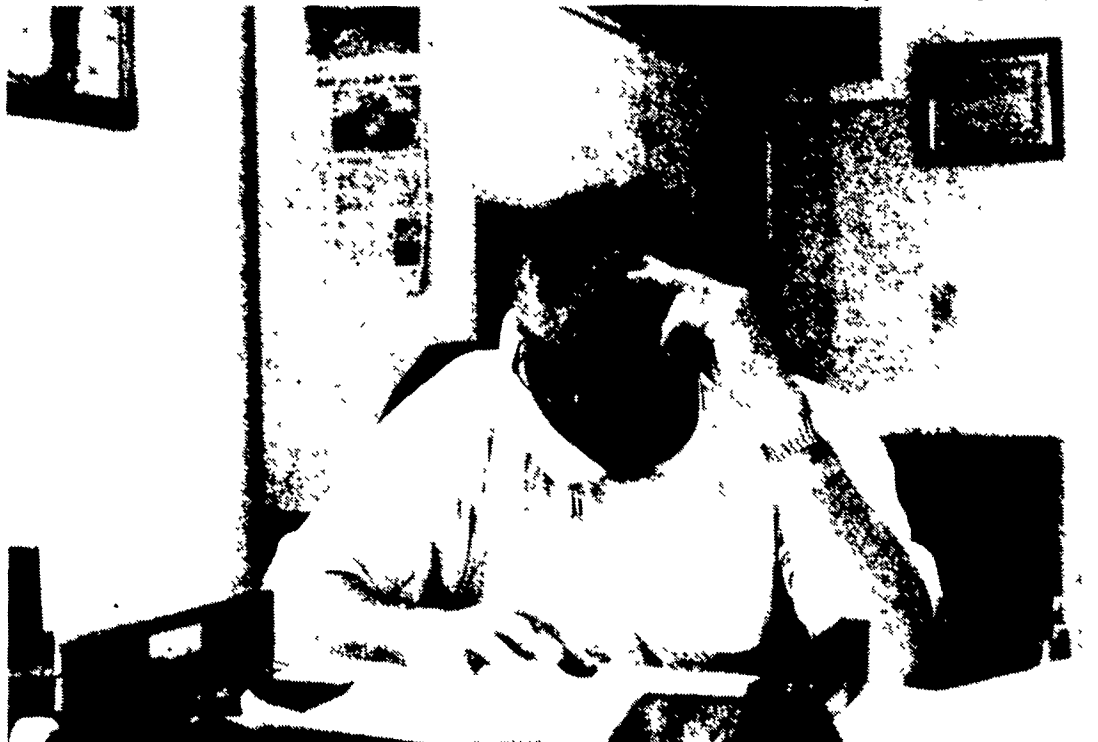
His interest in raising ornamental fishes came from landscaping, which lead to waterscaping, which led to stocking ponds with fish. Koi are the fish most often stocked in waterscape, backyard ponds.

However, the care and raising of ornamental fishes was not an expertise he was able to find and mine for information through Penn State Cooperative Extension.

(Turn to Page A33)



Richard Wizar drives a golf cart to get from one area to the next quickly, especially with supplies or plants. A number of farmers, especially those with some of the larger operations use golf carts or four-wheel drive all terrain vehicles to commute around the farm.



At his office, Richard Wizar talks to a customer about his pond system and attempts to trouble shoot the customer's problem over the phone.