

Teacher Program Tour Examines Specimen Trees, Greenhouse Flowers

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plex," a material with vitamins and minerals that "invigorates" the plant, he noted. It helps the plant with stress if uprooted, transported, and replanted when in leaf.

An underground watering system was installed at the nursery.

The problems faced by the landscape architects aren't necessarily the cooperation of the weather or changing consumer attitudes.

The problem is, "we're not seen as farmers," said DuBrow, who pointed out some legal challenges he experienced as a grower in New Jersey.

Legal squabbles have cost DuBrow thousands of dollars. But the public is reacting more negatively to what some consider work outside of farming — greenhouse and tree farms.

A major stress point, DuBrow noted, in the last three years is "defending what we do," he said. "We need in horticulture to have some identify as an associate to agriculture." This way, the industry can better relate to other industries and a public that increasingly does not understand what they do.

The landscape industry, DuBrow told the Ag In the Classroom participants, needs growers, "grafters," and other experts. The jobs will be in the industry, and can pay well "if you are into what you do." DuBrow said, "It's healthy work, it's satisfying to grow trees. It's amazing — the field of horticulture and what it offers. It's very

fulfilling."

The tour group also visited Laysen's Flowers, a family business in Myerstown, Tuesday evening.

Laysen's was started by Russell Laysen in 1939. In 1951 the business was purchased by Donald and Frances Laysen. Today it is managed by Donald, Steve, and Jeffery Laysen along with Rick Boltz and Earl Brown in wholesale operations and Connie Shaak in retail.

There are 14 acres of the greenhouse operation under cover, plus associated service buildings. Retail sales is comprised of an 8,000-square foot area for tropical foliage, 3,000 square feet for gifts and plant accessories, and a 15,000-square-foot area for bedding plants and year-round flowering plant sales.

A second area is situated on Rt. 645 about a half mile from the headquarters. The area has six acres under cover and includes rolling flood benches, computerized environmental controls, and a retractable roof curtain house.

There are more than 500,000 square feet under cover at the locations.

About 18 percent of the material sold goes to retail. The remainder is in wholesale.

There are 40 full-time employees at Laysen's and about 15 part-time.

According to Steven Laysen, the principal crops include spring bedding plants, holiday flowers, and

small foliage plants, in addition to a large array of landscape materials.

Donald Laysen explained the workings of the greenhouse. He showed the various size "plug" trays, including the 406's and 288's, that are used to grow plants before they are transplanted to 4- or 6-inch pots.

Flower baskets are sold to chain stores, garden centers, flower shops, and other stores.

A big seller has been the poinsettias.

In one seven to nine week period, the store stocks 150,000 poinsettias — "about eight acres of poinsettias," said Laysen.

Some of the plants are grown through a special thermal root zone watering system, which moves hot water through rubber coils underneath the pot. Temperature of the root zone is maintained at about 72 degrees to help the poinsettias root

in the summer.

About a half acre of the root zone watering system is used during the winter, Laysen noted.

Plants of all sorts are transported to customers. The business maintains about 20 trucks in all.

For the retail store, Laysen demonstrated their philosophy.

"Our concept is keep it filled like a grocer fills a grocery store," he said. The shelves are restocked

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Sheldon DuBrow demonstrates a calliper gauge on a seven-inch pin oak, one of the feature trees on the actual farm near a house built in 1850 and restored in 1989.

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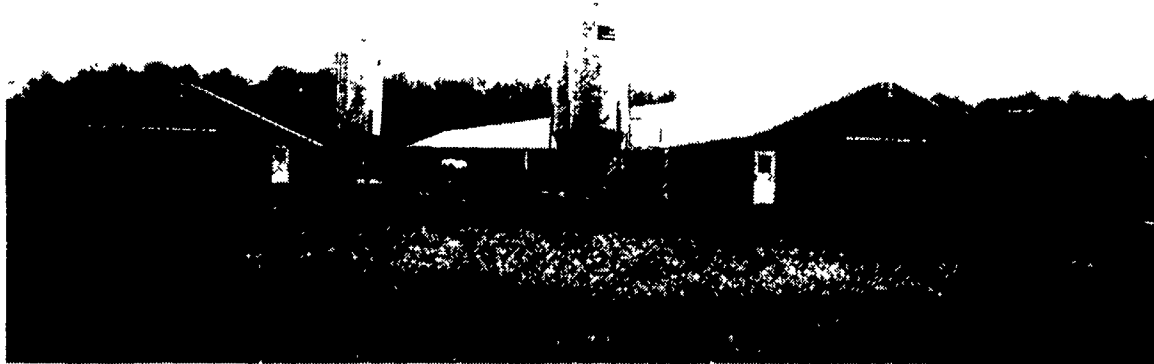
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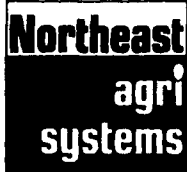
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