

PLANNING IN PINK

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, but there's never an off time to inspire breast cancer awareness in your community with a Pink Day event.

By Pete Mihalek

Pink cleats, pink gloves, pink wristbands and pink socks. Turn on any NFL game during the month of October and one thing's clear — it's Breast Cancer Awareness Month. But what about the rest of the year?

While football players are recognized as some of the toughest people around, the Proven Winners Pink Day campaign is working year-round to raise awareness of, support and celebrate an even tougher group of people — breast cancer patients and survivors.

Pink Day is a fundraising concept for breast cancer research that garden centers of any shape or size can host.

Stacey Hirvela, a Spring Meadow Nursery marketing specialist and an organizer with the Invincible Spirit Campaign (\$1 from every Invincible Spirit hydrangea sold is donated to the Breast Cancer Research Fund), says, "Many garden centers have hosted Pink Days because a customer, employee, or loved one battled breast cancer; but many more have hosted events because of the unfortunate likelihood that they will experience a brush with the disease at some point."

Here are three snapshots of locally owned garden centers getting involved, connecting with neighbors and giving back:

Pink Day into Night

From seminars to garden walks and ladies nights, Wasco Nursery & Garden Center near St. Charles, Ill., has held a number of different events over the last five years.

"Whatever we charged to get into the event, we gave to a local charity," says Cheryl Monzingo, Wasco's marketing manager. "I feel if you don't charge for an entrance and give it away for free, people don't value it as much."

As Monzingo's experience with garden center events grew, she and her staff reached a point where they wanted to see the ladies night event have a little more substance than just a fun night out.

"We received information about the Proven Winners Invincible Spirit Hydrangea campaign for breast cancer, which encouraged garden centers to host a Pink Day event," Monzingo says. "So we thought, well, we could just change our Ladies Night into a Pink Night and open it up to men and women, because this is something that affects all of us."

Wasco's Pink Night was held after hours on a Thursday evening in July, from 5 to 7 p.m. Pink Night drew nearly 150 people and raised approximately \$3,300 for breast cancer research.

Set in somewhat of a rural location, Cheryl turned to the closest local businesses for event support. "They were very accommodating with providing donations for raffles, and refreshments and food was donated by area restaurants," she says. "These local businesses felt this event was a nice chance for them to feel a part of something bigger, something important."



SIMPLE FROM THE START

Getting started is simple, explains Stacey Hirvela, Spring Meadow Nursery marketing specialist. "Set a date, inform your staff, brainstorm ideas for publicizing the event and decide which activities you'll include during the day."

The Pink Day planning guide from Proven Winners ColorChoice Shrubs (visit www.invincibellespirit.net to download it or request a hard copy) includes a step-by-step checklist for planning an event and offers ideas that garden centers across the U.S. and Canada have incorporated in their events. You can find further inspiration on the Invincible Spirit website and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/invincibellespirit).

"Hosting a Pink Day fundraiser is not about complying with a checklist of requirements and following a protocol," Hirvela explains. "Rather, it is a way to mobilize staff, customers, and community members to come together and utilize their own talents and ideas to create a unique, memorable event."

**Small Community
Makes Big Impact**



"We decided to plan a Pink Day after learning our store owner's wife was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer," says Darlene Hensley, nursery manager of Moneta Farm and Home Center in Moneta, Va. "In support of her, we thought this would be a good thing for us to take under our wing and do every year."

To keep event costs down, Hensley and garden center manager Becky Arney worked with other local businesses to supply items for a silent auction, raffle prizes and door prizes.

"An event of this nature should be a community effort," Hensley says. "Going to your business neighbors is one of the best things you can do when planning for an event like this. The more donations you get, the less that comes out of your garden center's pocket. You'll be surprised how much local businesses are willing to help when it's a good cause." Additionally, the church the Moneta Farm owners belong to held a bake sale in conjunction with the Pink Day event and generated a significant amount of money to donate.

This year, Moneta Farm's Pink Day fell on the third weekend in May. The farm and home center planned this event to piggyback on the success of two earlier weekend events.

"May is obviously a big month for garden centers and for us it starts with our popular Herb Festival followed by Mother's Day weekend," she says. "I know October is Breast Cancer Awareness month, but we didn't want to compete with other awareness and fall events that month."

"We were amazed from the support we received in our little community of Moneta," says Hensley. The retailer set a goal to raise \$3,000. "To our amazement, we raised twice this amount." After the event, Moneta's local newspaper covered the day "with a generous write-up and picture."

- One in eight women and one in 100 men will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetimes.

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- Just \$25 funds 30 minutes of research through the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, which means any size event can contribute to valuable, life-saving research.

Tougher Than a Lumberjack

With one of her office managers and her mother-in-law as breast cancer survivors, Melissa Cramer, promotional manager at Wheatfield Nursery in Centre Hall, Pa., didn't have to look long and hard to find a reason for her garden center to host a Pink Day event.

What makes Wheatfield's Pink Day different from most might be the inclusion of lumberjacks. Yes, lumberjacks.

As a member of the Pennsylvania Professional Lumberjack Association, Cramer was inspired by the Wrangler "Tough Enough to Wear Pink" campaign.

She noted that her Wheatfield co-workers and customers were interested in seeing a demonstration of a lumberjack competition.



"I thought this would be a great way to demonstrate the strength and determination breast cancer survivors and patients have," Cramer says.

As for planning the event, Cramer admits there was some uncharted territory;

Wheatfield Nursery is only in its third year as a retail nursery and the Pink Day event was the first official event at the operation.

"We were already carrying the Invincible Spirit hydrangeas and the materials and checklist Proven Winners was able to provide to us made it easy to put this day together rather quickly," she says.

Already looking to grow next year's event, Cramer says she is working with a horticultural marketing class at Penn State University to help plan the event. As a former student of the class, Cramer keeps in contact with its professor.

"Next year, we're hoping for new ideas from the class for event marketing with a small budget," she says. "Having about 30 more creative minds will hopefully help."

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- Since the Pink Days campaign started in 2010, the average garden center donation is \$880. The current total donation to the Breast Cancer Research Fund from Proven Winners' Invincibelle Spirit hydrangea and Pink Day is \$482,906.00.*

*This total does not include the donations from the 2012 sales of Invincibelle Spirit hydrangea.



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