

Va Va Bloom

Dickman Farms Greenhouse & Garden Center in Auburn, New York, rolled out the red carpet for its annual spring kickoff event the second week of April. Retail general manager Stephanie Whitehouse talks about the success of this year's Hollywood and movie-themed Va Va Bloom.

By Abby Kleckler



HOW LONG HAS THE SHOW BEEN GOING ON?

It's been going on for over 10 years, and with this year, last year and the year before we started incorporating themes into the event. In 2016 we had an all-things-edible farmers market or farm-to-table theme, so there was farming scenes and oversized vegetables. I think that was also the first year we started incorporating and doing the farmers market, which is a 50-plus vendor, local producer and artisan market held in our perennial department. It's everything from local breweries and local wineries, local farms and cheesemakers, and local artisans that are a little more upscale than crafters. We also bring in an alpaca farm as a petting zoo sort of thing. Last year's theme was a history of Dickman Farms, so we created five different vignettes or museum displays where you traveled through the greenhouse and picked up the history because we've been around since 1903. A lot of people don't realize how long we've been around. We were a produce farm first, and we did have a nightclub at one point and a mini golf course and lots of fun things that it's amazing to realize how closely knit and how woven into the fabric of the local community we are.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS YEAR'S MOVIE THEME.

It all started from Kate who is our store manager and our head buyer. She went to the BFG buying show and saw these silhouette life-size people cutouts of paparazzi and movie stars, so they sparked the idea. We decided on the movies and the Oscars, so we had a whole red-carpet theme where you entered the garden center under a grand entrance, which had a couple different display beds. Each different vignette or display we had in the garden center was a different movie genre, so we had things like Fantasy, Wild West, a Horror theme or Sci-Fi theme and a Romance scene. People really got into it, and each vignette was created so that it was like a selfie-spot, and you could get into the display and interact with it.



HOW DID YOU GET A RECORD NUMBER OF ATTENDEES THIS YEAR?

We really beefed up our marketing for this year with a new TV commercial that had a complete red-carpet/Oscar theme to it. We've had commercials in the past, but with the theme, working with a production company and some additional budgeting dollars into the frequency made a huge difference. We also heightened social media presence, so both those things we think helped us reach a different market and more people. In the past it has been more of an older crowd, but this year it was distinctively one of the biggest things and very noticeable trend that there were a lot of families with children in tow, and a lot of new homebuyer people. It's been refreshingly amazing. We feel this year had a lot more cross-marketing too. All the food trucks were pushing it pretty heavily, and we're members of the local Chamber of Commerce. The director is one of our good customers, so she did a push for us too. We also have a lot of snowbirds in our local community where they'll go to Florida for the winter, and they'll have come back in time for Va Va Bloom. **LGR**

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO AT THE EVENT?

We have the farmers market, and we always do a food truck caravan as well. We added an additional food truck this year, so we had five, and then we always have live music on both days, which is a good draw and fun. We have pop-in or drop-in make-and-take bars or workshops. We did two this year: one was a spring basket with plant material that was cool for growing outside right now, and the other was a miniature/fairy/zen (whatever your heart desires) mini garden. Both of those were really well attended. The event is free, and then the only thing we charge for are those workshops and then the kid event, which we partnered with a local public art group, Art Emporium. They brought "kindness rocks." For the \$5, the kids were able to paint two rocks, one they could keep and then one they could put into the kindness path, which was actually inside the garden center because the weather was so cold. We generally do five to six seminars each day that are about an hour long, and we bring in industry experts for these. We also have greenhouse tours on both days, which is one of the only times we invite the public to come and see what we do on the wholesale side. The Dickman men always have a really big crowd for that.

