

a focused approach

In August, my brother got married in Littleton, Colorado, making it a destination wedding for all but four guests. The wedding was incredible, and they even had activities planned for the days leading up to the “I do.”

That Thursday a large group of us did a hike in the morning and rolled into Mac Nation Café right around lunchtime. The bride and groom recommended it from a previous trip, and we were all ready to eat.

Mac Nation Café is the epitome of a place that does one thing extremely well. They have dozens of mac and cheese varieties, but they all start with the same noodle and cheese base before toppings are added and the mac is baked in the oven. Each variety is representative of a different city or state in the U.S.; think BBQ chicken and bacon for Texas or pineapple and spam for Hawaii.

The customer service was top notch, the food was hot and delicious, and everyone left full and talking up the restaurant to anyone who would listen for the rest of the weekend.

This place got me thinking about figuring out what you're great at and finding ways to expand on that without getting caught up in doing more just for the sake of doing more.

Mac Nation Café also made me think about a stop on the Garden Centers of America (GCA) Summer Tour — highlights from which can be seen starting on page 24.

Rainier View Winery & Nursery in Graham, Washington, sells wine and plants, and they do events that combine the two. By the time we arrived in late June, the nursery was completely sold out and it was focusing on wine sales, and that was a point of pride for owners Clay and JoLeigh Thornburg.

All their hanging baskets — the garden center's real focus — garden starts, annuals, perennials and custom pots sold out in six weeks. They mentioned the nursery normally sells out in 12 weeks, but customers have been trained — my word, not theirs — to get in early because they will sell out quickly.

This is a different way of doing business, but they have found the two things that work best for them, the time of year they can be the star and how to maximize profits with the resources they have.

merchandising stars

One of my favorite things we do each year is the Merchandiser of the Year competition. This year we have six finalists that you'll find starting on page 10. The amount of creativity we find with all the entries is impressive. I can imagine walking through these stores and thinking to myself “wow.”



As I was writing about the focused approach above, I looked at all the finalists in a similar light. Each display executes a specific theme for maximum impact, even while in many cases they include products across multiple categories.

Wilson Nurseries created a “jungalow” meant to inspire early spring sales. Lurvey Home & Garden focused on an oasis to embrace summertime. Distinctive Gardens encouraged customers to create personalized succulent gifts. Sunnyside Nursery wanted to make natives hip. Sollecito Landscaping Nursery featured branded plants in a whimsical way. And Scots Landscape carried the same vibrant colors throughout a series of displays.

You won't want to miss reading all about the finalists' ideas, execution and responses. Then stay tuned for more on the winner in the next issue.

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