

# CREATING THE

# HYPE

Baker's Acres Greenhouse & Garden Center maximizes its rural location by offering unique plant material and an experience worth the drive.

By Abby Kleckler

**B**usinesses can change a lot in 35 years. What started as a single greenhouse growing produce has turned into a 15 greenhouse operation that grows 90 percent of the plants in its retail store.

Baker's Acres Greenhouse & Garden Center is owned by Chris and Nancy Baker. Around 2007, their son Nick and his then-girlfriend Pamela started working at the business. The rest is history, and the now married pair run many of the daily operations.

The seasonal business is located in rural Alexandria, Ohio, with a population of approximately 500 and a half-hour drive from Columbus.

"We get a big draw for people who need to come out just that one time a year and get all the stuff that they can't find at other places," Pamela says. "Making sure people know what they're doing when they walk out our door is how we want to differentiate ourselves."

Baker's Acres has come up with many ways to make it easier for customers preparing for their one big shopping trip, and those who are more frequent visitors.

## (Still) Growing Categories

Customers come in looking for some tried-and-true favorites as well as some newer trends.

"Succulents just continue to be kind of out of control, and people are crazy for them," Pamela says. "They want to do stuff with the succulents that they see in magazines, and we're just always trying to guide people to use the right growing conditions for all our material."

The key to success at Baker's Acres is not only showing people what visually goes together but also what goes together care-wise.

"We don't want people to walk out of our door and fail because we didn't give them the advice they needed," Pamela says.

The annuals program is the largest category at Baker's Acres and, in particular, Pamela says they continue to see year-over-year growth with their 4-inch pots.

"Our 4-inch container program is just big. It has always been our No. 1 seller," she says. "I think containers continue to be a big thing that people do, judging by how much we sell for containers."

Pamela and Nick also get a lot of business from combination planters and, particularly, special order combinations for customers.

There is no doubt peppers are hot, but it's actually all edibles and herbs that continue to have increased sales.

"We have heirloom stuff, we have weird things that you can't find anywhere else, so that continues to be a draw," Pamela says. "The herbs also in the past couple years keep going up. Usually herbs are one of the first things people come in asking for and wanting."

## Into the Night

The most popular annual event at Baker's Acres has roots that go back many years: a night sale.

"My in-laws started that long ago, and they called it the All-Night Sale, and they literally stayed open all night long," Pamela says. "The way my mother-in-law used to do it was that she would have a different sale every hour to keep people coming in."

The event was always on the Friday of Mother's Day weekend and then they would cap it off Saturday morning.

Over the years the event, however, has evolved. "The past couple years we've pushed it to the

end of May, so the weather can be slightly more reliable," Pamela says. "Also, there became the issue of, 'Why are we selling our stuff on sale on Mother's Day weekend when we're always super busy anyway?'"

In addition to a new weekend, the night sale now takes place from 8 p.m. until 10 p.m. on a Saturday night, and it has turned into quite the party.

"Nick's dad is in a band, so they come and perform, and last year we did a beer tasting," Pamela says. "We get a food truck to come, and we have a local garden club that comes in and does free baked goods for people."

All plant material is sold at 10 percent off, and Pamela says they have people lined up for the checkout by 8 p.m. all the way out the door waiting to make their purchases.

"It's turned into a really fun thing for people to come and do," Pamela says. "We're getting a lot







of first-time customers for it. People bring friends, and it's just crazy."

## Embracing Technology

Many customers have a substantial drive to get to Baker's Acres, so the business has found a way to utilize their website to help these shoppers plan.

Instead of relying only on a printed catalog every year, Pamela, a self-proclaimed "tech nerd" thought of a different idea.

"We made ourselves a database that we use in production, and what we ended up doing is linking it to our website," she says. "The website stays current and is updated nightly, so as soon as we find out we're not going to have something, we go in and mark it 'not available' in the database, and it'll update on the website."

Even when the store isn't open for the season, people can go online and see what's in the pipeline, complete with photos.

Then once everything is stocked and ready at retail, the team marks everything available in the database and, therefore, on the website.

As soon as it's sold out for the season, this is reflected online as well.

The benefits are not only for the customers but also for Pamela and Nick on the backend.

"Nick and I have great help once we go to Cultivate and to trial gardens or wherever and start planning out the whole new season because we have everything right there in front of us: when it was available, so we know if we need to start things early, and then also when it sold out," Pamela says. "Did we need to have more? Did we have too much? That kind of stuff."

## Door Buster Ideas

Baker's Acres is always thinking of ways to create hype through email blasts and newsletters. Some of these ideas are just to get people in the door while others are for the most-popular items.

"We do a lot of loss-leader events. We find a good deal at our perennial wholesaler and then we bring in a ton of that one item," Pamela says. "We sell it basically for cost and then get the customer to come out and hopefully buy other things."

An email blast tells people a day, time, price and limit.

"It creates this sense of urgency that they've got to get there and get it," Pamela says. "One year we did peonies and we did them the weekend after Mother's Day and it's kind of the iconic Memorial Day flower, so that was insane. We brought in 150 and they were gone before noon that Saturday."

Baker's Acres is trying something new this year based largely off of a hobby for Nick and Pamela.

"One thing we noticed in the craft beer industry and some other industries, and it's just kind of exploding, is creating this buzz about a release day," Pamela says. "A brew is coming out and they're going to release it on this day, and that's the day you got to get there and get it or it might be gone."

Why not do the same with plants?

"We're going to try to incorporate that this year with some of the things that people just have our phones ringing off the hook about," Pamela says. "We'll do an e-blast for them and say, 'Here's the

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## Why So Serious?

Just a quick look at the mission statements on the Baker's Acres Greenhouse & Garden Center website ([www.bakersacresgreenhouse.com](http://www.bakersacresgreenhouse.com)) shows there's a little something unique about the business.

"My father-in-law [Chris Baker] is the shtick guy," Pamela Baker says. "We like to have a lot of fun, we don't take ourselves too seriously, and we like to make sure our customers have fun."

Music is always playing in the greenhouse, and as Chris makes the CDs he mixes in all the company's commercials that air on the radio, which are complete with a lot of humor.

Some of the signs throughout the garden center are meant to make people laugh, and the displays have a little bit of quirk as well.

"I have this weird mannequin. Her name is Ellen, and we'll dress her up in Baker's Acres clothes," Pamela says. "I'll shove her in displays and she gets watered and ruined, but it's just a little bit of weird that really gets people talking about it."

first day it's going to be out, the full selection, so come and get it."

One of the most highly anticipated crops that Pamela sees great potential for a release date is a coleus, bred by Chris Baker.

Other hot items are succulents and tomato plants. The timing might be tricky, according to Pamela, but she's excited to see the results.

"It's something that's working for a specialty niche of retail even though it's something completely different," she says. "We tend to have that draw for people who come in for this, that or the other thing. They call all year and want to know when it's going to be ready, so now they can stop calling, write it in their calendar and not have to worry about planning their trip based on a phone call." **LGR**



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