

MAKING A STATEMENT

Grower-retailer Canoyer Garden Center continues to expand while focusing on customer experience and staying true to its roots.

By Abby Kleckler

A lot can change in a decade. Farmers at heart, Craig and Kathy Canoyer opened up a greenhouse next to their home near Griswold, Iowa, to sell some extra plants in 1986. Canoyer Garden Center was born and steadily started growing.

In 2001, their son, Kyle Canoyer, joined the business. In the past 10 years, expansion has been the key word.

In 2006, they opened a retail location in Papillion, Nebraska (near Omaha), and in 2015 a similar store opened in Griswold, Iowa (near Des Moines).

Each location now has approximately 25,000 square feet of growing space and another 25,000 square feet of retail.

"We're really greenhouse-oriented people, so our retail [locations] are all greenhouses with a hard covering for our gift shop," Kyle says. "They're both about \$2 million facilities, and they make a statement when you come in."

All About the Annuals

The main focus of the building is the annuals department, which also takes up the most square footage, according to Kyle.

"The cool thing with our annual business is we not only have variety, but we also have the quantity to

back it up," he says. "For instance, last year we grew 35 colors of geraniums with seven shades of red."

With a growing facility on the property, Canoyer Garden Center can re-stock retail efficiently, which appeals to the younger customer and the customer who wants to do their entire house all the same.

"In today's day and age, especially the younger generation who you're trying to gear toward, they want something now," Kyle says. "If you don't

have it at your store, they're going to go to the next stop and grab it because they're working on the project today."

Gone are the days when past generations would stop by later in the week when something came in stock.

Strong Hiring

Kyle says that although signage is important, his focus is on having the right quantity of employees so every customer can get help and have an enjoyable experience.

"For the part-time people I do hire for personality over knowledge," Kyle says. "I want somebody to come in and not only get their questions answered but they're going to have a good time. I hire people who are fun and energetic and will joke around with the customers and give them the full experience."

Kyle finds both personality and knowledge for his full-time hires, who then play a key role in training the part-time employees.

"The key with the people you're training is that they don't just bring you a customer and walk away," he says. "They bring you a customer, they listen to the question, they listen to the answer and then they know from that point on."



Bikes 15 miles to work daily.

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Real claim to fame? Growing the tastiest tomatoes on Marcy Avenue.

Kyle's Special

Kyle Canoyer always knew he wanted to get into the family business. Growing up on a farm, Kyle says that he was 10 years old when his brother Brad would head out to the fields and he would stay back at the greenhouse.

"My mom would have a container that she would put together for sale for say \$15, and I would tell her that I would buy that container from her and pay her when it sells," Kyle says.

He'd then take that container, make a sign that read "Kyle's Special," mark it up to \$25 and move it to the front of the store. It would sell, he'd pay his mom \$15 and he'd pocket the other \$10.

"Literally from 10 years old I was making money in the business. I was marketing, creating signage and moving it to high-selling areas before I knew that stuff even existed," Kyle says. "My parents would get the biggest kick out of it."

Kyle hires part-timers in January and February and starts them in mid- to late-March, so they have a full month under their belt before busy season really hits.

Growing the Gift Shop

The first thing customers see when they walk in the door is a sizeable gift shop.

"A lot of people in the industry discourage you from the gift shop side of things, but we gear our gift shop definitely toward women and it has worked really well," Kyle says.

At the Papillion location, Kyle's wife Stephanie is the gift shop manager.

"[Stephanie] wants space in between the displays," he says. "People have the wrong mentality that the more you have, the more you're going to sell. It's true in some sense, but if people can't see what's there because it looks so full, they just move on."

The team tries to visit as many markets and distributor shows as feasible to find the next best thing before a chain store picks it up.

"When my wife has new products to use to create displays, it really creates a wow factor," Kyle says. "That makes all the difference in the world."

Down-Home Event

Canoyer Garden Center hosts a container gardening seminar to kick off spring the last weekend of March or the first weekend of April that Kyle describes as "crazy good."

Nearly 200 people head to each store for two or three different seminars run by Kathy Canoyer.



"It's neat to have the original owner and the original people who started the business (my mom and dad) come up to this location," Kyle says. "The seminar basically teaches people how to container garden from proper soil and a proper container to the proper plants and how to put it all together."

Customers pay a flat rate to create a 12-inch floor container and then Canoyer's keeps it and grows it

for two weeks in its greenhouse, since it's still too early for them to take it home and put it outside.

They then come back around April 15, during the business' open house weekend, to pick up their containers and enjoy all the spring kickoff festivities.

"This event is a huge benefit of having a growing facility right here," Kyle says, "which has always been the core of our business." **LGR**

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