

GARDEN & Chic life

Adventures in
IGC Entrepreneurial
Retailing

featuring
Harvey's Farm & Garden Center
Westborough, MA

Emily Harvey, Manager

WHAT STARTED OUT decades ago as a dairy farm, Harvey's Farm & Garden Center, Westborough, MA, has evolved into a dynamic full-service garden center known for its outside-the-box niches and fresh way of doing things. Manager Emily Harvey, the sixth generation of leadership for the retailer, is helping to lead the way. "Just being involved in the business and showing Dad some other ways to do things," she says, has inspired the movement forward.

Fresh out of college with a studio arts degree, Emily lends insight on how to creatively merchandise. "As far as color, shape, texture - no matter if it's an outdoor garden display or one inside the store - a lot comes from that design background as a visual artist," she says.

Emily also provides her perspective on how a 23-year-old views the garden center. "Dad had traditionally organized plants by herbs, annuals, perennials. Now, we're trying to get into the theme of organizing by color," she says. For contemporary ideas, she looks to *Garden Chic*. "I really appreciate that it offers people in my generation a different way of looking at things," Emily says. "A lot of times, things are targeted for people who've been in the industry for 25 or 30 years."

New Ways of Positioning

Instead of relying upon traditional shelving, Harvey's uses cranberry boxes in displays throughout the property. "We don't



have any regular metal displays with pegboard and items in a row. We strive to be different from that," Emily says. "Using two or three of these boxes stacked off the floor raises the product and gives it a different window to look into the same inventory." Not only the unique fixtures but the color of them, Emily says, makes products pop. Some of the boxes have been whitewashed, and recently, the natural wood tables used to display plants were painted white to create a "bright, cheerful, clean look," she says. "It's harder for maintenance, but if it makes the product that

much more visible to the customer, that's going to make the sale."

Placing product at customers' every turn is what sparks more sales at Harvey's. With the addition of a 14,000-square-foot greenhouse last year, a corridor between the existing gift barn and the greenhouse created the opportunity to showcase more items. "It forces people to slow down there," Emily says. "We've sold so many things from that area." Among the best sellers: "funky" birdhouses, decorative plant stakes and other garden whimsy items. "We really learned from that space, in general, about slowing people down and giving them something to look at as they enter the barn or garden center."

Variety of merchandise is what keeps customers coming back to Harvey's. "We've divided our store into rooms, even though it's all open and movable. We've put things like old doors in to divide areas," Emily says.

The "Zen Den" area is stocked full of bath and body items. An old antique claw-foot tub is filled with bars of soap.

The "Bird Wing" draws a crowd, offering a range of bird feeders, from ceramics to copper, and recycled plastic birdhouses. Higher-end birdseed is also a draw.

The gourmet food selection has brought a regular following of customers, too. "We offer our own private-labeled products," Emily says. "We have a full line of jams and

jellies. We also have locally made frozen chicken and turkey pot pies, which are a big hit, especially when it gets colder. People who know we have them are repeat customers." Organically produced honey from about 100 hives along the back of the farm is popular too, along with seasonings, barbecue sauces and fresh produce.

After 15 years of offering a selection of candies on site, Harvey's has refined its "Sweet Retreat" concept. "This year, with our new expansion, we made a special spot where we were able to expand our candy selection," Emily says. "We really wanted to promote nostalgic candies, novelty candies." The new offerings, especially candy-filled toys, have taken off. "Kids love them," Emily says.

Family-Oriented Fun

Family is a focus at Harvey's. "We're very family-oriented, not just because it's a family running it but that it's a place for families," she says.

The favorite activities for customers and their kids: the garden center's working model train and the resident farm animals. "We built a custom train track from the ceiling of the retail space in the gift barn. It has two tracks, so trains go in opposite directions," Emily says. "When you come to see the animals, you get your bag of food, your carrot for the rabbit, a sweet treat and then you go see the train." In addition to rabbits, the garden center is home to goats, ducks and pot-bellied pigs.

Another draw for young families: organics. "Way before it was trendy to go green and recycle and not use chemicals, we were doing it," Emily says. "It's funny, because a lot of customers will come in and say, 'When did you decide to go organic?' But we've been doing it the whole time." ■