

NEWS

Family farm continues to grow from deep roots

by Heidi Fehring

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Andrew Joyer began the study of liberal arts when he enrolled at the University of Minnesota after his 2001 graduation from Forest Lake High School.

"I wanted to get as far away from agriculture as possible," he said.

Eventually, Joyer, a fourth generation member of the Waldoch Farm family, decided his farming roots grew deep. He earned a degree in environmental horticulture and recently became the fourth generation to join the 90-year-old family business.

"Deep down, I always thought I'd be a farmer," Joyer said. "There's a lot of opportunity here."

William Waldoch, Joyer's great-grandfather, bought the farm in 1917, where he raised chickens and grew vegetables to sell in a small roadside stand. The stand still exists, but the farm has expanded considerably over the years.

Joyer now works full-time at the business.

"I'm still fairly low on the totem pole," he said as he took a break in one of the farm's greenhouses. "But if I can make a sustainable career out of it, I would not mind working here for the rest of my life."

Joyer's mother, Mary Joyer, runs the farm after buying out her father's share in 1997, thus making her Andrew's boss.

"The expectations will be a little higher, since you expect your children to work harder," Mary Joyer said.

Mary's parents, Daniel and Lucille Waldoch, took over most of the farm in the 1960s and began selling their vegetables at farmer's markets five times a week. They built the farm's first greenhouse shortly after and began expanding. In 1982, they bought the remaining acres from William, and by 1990 a second greenhouse was built.

The farm now is a garden and retail center, with five greenhouses, a store, and 99 percent of the plants grown right on the property.

Andrew and his five siblings have always been involved in the operation of the business.

"They've worked on the farm since they were born; this is what we did as a family," said Mary. "From as soon as they could walk, they were in the vegetable garden, sometimes working and sometimes playing in the dirt."

Andrew had an internship with a landscaping company during college, but decided working for the family business had better rewards.

"I'm not making so much money, but the more I put in here the more I'll get back," he said. "The principle return is better."

Although the goal was always to try and keep the farm within the family, Mary Joyer encouraged her children to explore other options.

"I always hoped one of them would come back, but there was never any pressure," she said.

The only real adjustment to joining the family business, said Andrew, is separating work from home. Which can be difficult, as the family lives next door to the farm.

"The hard part is realizing when Mom is boss and when Mom is Mom," he said. "But once we cross the driveway, that's when the greenhouse ends ... most of the time."

Waldoch Farm was around well before Lino Lakes became a city. It's evolution from roadside vegetable stand to a multi-purpose retail and garden center is a result of family tradition and work ethic, said Mary.

"We turned it into a real family business, but it didn't start that way," she said. "This business was a lifestyle decision. As long as I can play in the dirt, I'll play in the dirt."

Mary, an avid gardener, would love to have more time to plant.

"Everything is intermingled," she said. "When I worked in my garden, my kids would say, 'Mom, when are you going to stop working?' I would try to explain that it was not work for me, but play."

Andrew also had his own garden growing up, he said, but he began looking at plants differently in college.

"I started learning the different concepts and practical applications involved in doing this," he said.

It's more than planting seeds. Starting in February, they work seven days a week through October to get the plants started, growing and maintained in the greenhouses. Mary's sister, Kathy Rivard, designs all of the plants' original containers. The sisters also go to buying shows during fall and winter to stock the store with garden tools and gifts.

Andrew shares in his family's vision for the business.

"Our goal is to become a destination garden center," he said. "We want to be more than a Home Depot center."

Although he grew up on the farm, Andrew still has to work his way up.

"I like to joke that I'll work for my mom until she works for me," he said.

Eventually, he would like to be in a managerial position and make more business decisions.

"There's a lot I still don't know," he said. "But I'm learning by doing."

Andrew was offered a full-time job after his internship with the landscaping company, but he decided against it.

"I'd just be working for a paycheck," he said. "Here, I'm working for a legacy."

"And they don't hug there!" said Kathy, wrapping her arms around him.

Mary said she would eventually like to pass on her managerial duties to someone else and spend more time planting.

"Andrew could be that one," she said.

For now, Andrew said he is working hard and keeping the legacy alive.

"We have roots that are deep," he said. "As long as we're able to do this, we're going to do it. It's kind of like a mission for us."

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