

grocery stores, and we'll sell to the small guy that will just sell in the city," says DeLeon, explaining that his sales are beginning to cater to a changing market. "We're starting to align ourselves with a lot of bigger nurseries that are very firm in their positions in some of the chain stores." DeLeon is aiming at offering more varieties to the mass market stores, with fewer vendors so the sales of varieties are not cluttered at big chain stores.

"It seems to be the future of the mass market because it does not want so many vendors to deal with. They want fewer vendors so that they're not jamming up their parking lots," DeLeon says.

Seeming to be perpetually evolving, DeLeon's Bromeliads' future is dependent on the growing demand of the customer. However, that same progression is consistent with improvement of the varieties that DeLeon already sells. Instead of being stagnant, the company is always trying to improve its crops for success in a flourishing, yet changing market, DeLeon says.

A change that is otherwise controversial is the pay-by-scan system, which he feels is going to impact growers in dubious ways. Aware of the contentious, emerging method, DeLeon asserts that it's only going to push growers to step up quality.

"I think that quality will become a bigger issue as time plays on, like it is in Europe, because if people don't have quality, then the sales will not be good and the products will be dropped," DeLeon says. "I think that quality in the future will be the biggest issue."

#62 Young's Nursery and Greenhouses

After New York investment firm Weiss, Peck & Greer bought Young's Nursery and Greenhouses, then shut it down in 2002, the bedding plant producer has made a roaring comeback as a top grower in the floriculture industry. As an oversight this year, Young's was not included in our Top 100 rankings; however, its 958,320 square feet should merit it a spot at

No. 62 between Garden State Growers, and the three-way tie at No. 59 of California growers Ameri-Cal, Brand Flowers Inc. and Sunshine Floral Inc.

Just north of Nashville, the Gallatin, Tenn.-based grower has invested in modern, mechanized equipment that has helped downsize the number of employees needed for peak and year-round periods. Additionally, Young's has greenhouses in Smithville, about 70 miles from Gallatin, which



Gene Young's company is back in the game after its five-year absence.

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TOP 100 GROWERS GROWER PROFILES

President Jeff Young established during the company's corporate ownership. These helped Young's get back on its feet when CEO Gene Young bought the business back and it's flourishing once again.

Efficiency has been instrumental in rejuvenating the company financially, by employing practices like carefully supervising fuel use and recycling tags and flats. Likewise, Young's has always been regarded for the personal attention it offers to customers, one of its strategies for success and retaining customers.

"I think what makes us stand out more than anything is service and quality," says Gene Young, who started the business in 1975. "We try to do it all, we try to give the best service and quality that's out there, whatever it takes."

Besides bedding plants, Young's offers an array of mums, poinsettias, ferns, hanging baskets and a few

perennials that all bear the trademark, Music City Flowers. About 60 percent of Young's products are marketed through mass merchandisers, while the rest is diversified among grocery chains, landscapers, independent garden centers and hardware stores; and the company generally does business within 350 miles, Young says.

Due to the sprawl of greater Nashville into surrounding communities that were once considered rural, Young's has been adding on to its more distant Smithville operation, with the construction of two more acres underway. "They're building a Lowe's about a quarter mile from me, a Home Depot on the other side and a Publix across the street, so it's just a matter of time that we'll probably have to relocate the whole operation to Smithville," explains Young of his Gallatin location.

Since returning from a five-year hiatus from the company, Young is surprised at how fast the industry is evolving, with respect to the number of varieties and how mass merchan-



In addition to mums, ferns and poinsettias, Young's annuals are big sellers.

disers are changing the way they buy plants from growers.

"We're trying to keep up, and I just don't see any let up in it. We just have to get adjusted to the times we live in and realize that the money and profit is not here like it used to be," explains Young. "I can try to get a little increase each year if I can, but if not, I just have to get better at what I do here, more efficiently." **GG**

Stay tuned to GG's September issue, where we'll highlight two more of our Top 100 Growers in 2005.

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