

Self-marketing and a new generation



BY MARIA ZAMPINI

We'll get further ahead by having a grassroots marketing campaign in which each of us sings the praises of our product and what it can do for the consumer.

Maria Zampini is president of Lake County New Plants LLC, Madison, Ohio. She co-founded the company with her father, Jim Zampini. Their focus is sales and marketing of LCN Selections along with research and development of new plant introductions. She can be reached at maria.zampini@yahoo.com.

It sure seemed like the little bit of time I spent in September at home and not on the road, all it did was rain, rain and rain some more in northeastern Ohio. And if it didn't rain, then it was gray clouds and cold. I know I probably shouldn't complain about it, but the wet weather continued into the first week of October before Mother Nature finally allowed us to enjoy some blue skies, which enhanced all the absolutely spectacular fall colors our products provide. It's just a bummer that within a couple weeks, the leaves will be all gone! Those who don't get to experience the change of seasons don't know what they miss. Then again, they are the ones by the pool while we're digging out of snowstorms!

Anyway, during this extended rainy period, I had the chance to head to McMinnville, Tenn., which, just like Lake County, Ohio, claims to be the Nursery Capital of the World. Unlike rainy Ohio, though, it was warm and sunny the entire week we were there. It's a bit of a drive, but my father and I always enjoy spending a couple days touring nurseries and attending the Middle Tennessee Nursery Association trade show to catch up with old friends and meet new ones.

While at the show, it seemed like more than ever before I was being stopped and asked what I thought was going to happen in the industry. I said what I thought even though it probably wasn't what most people wanted to hear. One of the new acquaintances I made this year was Joe Napoli of Athens Wholesale Nursery in Georgia. I liked the way Joe summed things up. He said, "We're keeping afloat, but not enough to get ahead" and "We're making dollars, but not making money." At the same time, though, Joe seems to be concentrating his energies on what he could do to make a difference in his nursery and the industry instead of wasting time on what other nurseries may or may not be doing that negatively affects his business.

After we returned, I attended a Nursery Growers of Lake County, Ohio (NGLCO) dinner. President Carol Lyons of Sunleaf Nursery, Madison, and Executive Secretary Annette Howard of Gilson Gardens, Perry, put together a really great meeting with updates from both the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association and the American Nursery

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and Landscape Association (ANLA). Those members in attendance heard the good, the bad and the ugly on both a state and national level.

Both ANLA representatives—Bob Dolbois, Executive Vice President and Craig Regelbrugge, Vice President for Government Relations and Research—each gave their two cents' worth on the upcoming election and its potential ramifications. Isn't it a sad commentary when one of the few people on the Hill who actually "gets it" is Stephen Colbert?

Bob brought up some interesting observations about where our industry stands at this point in time. If you'll allow me to paraphrase a bit, he pointed out the following:

- To some degree, we probably coulda, shoulda seen a downturn coming as there are 11 million fewer Generation X'ers compared to Baby Boomers.

- It will take 10 to 15 years for Generation Y to come of age, but once they

do their numbers will be much greater than those of the Baby Boomers.

• Baby Boomers don't want to move; they want to spend more on yard renovation so they have an area for the grandkids. In the thick of their careers they were away all the time, but now they are spending more time at home.

• Generation Y'ers represent a marketing opportunity, and we need to show them how our product can save them money, give them food, save on energy and more.

• We need to become better business people.

Of course, the 10 to 15-year figure is pretty scary. But, he said what we need is a bridge plan from now to then, and to not give up hope as there is light at the end of the tunnel. In my mind, as long as the ray of sunshine is at least the size of a pin-prick, you've got to have faith the light will grow brighter.

I know I'm one who keeps bringing up a national marketing campaign. Bob said he believes that won't solve all the problems of the world, and he believes right now we'll get further ahead by having a grassroots marketing campaign in which each of us sings the praises of our product and what it can do for the consumer. I firmly believe that there is a right time and a right place for everything. I'm hopeful that ANLA is successful in bringing the newest marketing concept, the "Yard Star" program, to fruition. Bob told us it is modeled after the Energy Star program where there would be an energy saving rating for our products just like there is for appliances. How cool would that be? What better way to start marketing our products and services nationally than this? And, it would only enhance other established programs such as the successful America in Bloom.

In these challenging times, it's necessary to scrutinize every penny we spend. The NGLCO meeting reminded me once again that being part of a local, state and/or national association is a solid investment. I believe the information, savings, relationships and representation you derive from being part of a quality organization can help make the difference, whether you're here or not when the Gen Y's come of age. Not sure? Then I want to personally invite you to visit my national association's website, www.anla.org. Click on The Knowledge Center in the upper right hand corner. You might just find a key to help you span the bridge from baby boomers to Gen X, then GenY—and it won't even cost you a dime.

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