



HAVILAND HAPPENINGS

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Haviland Talks...

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Brent Shalk, "A Business Is Only as Strong as the People Who Work There"



At the tender age of 25, Brent Shalk, a native of Anderson, Indiana, purchased Blue Grass Farms, a 500 acre sod farm. This was no bold move for this enterprising young man, as he recounts the journey three decades later, "I always wanted to be in business—it was just a natural progression for me. You have to do things when you are ready." Shalk continues, "I am the product of kind people—mentors and others who helped me in business. Dozens of people helped me. When you're in business, you need to have a good time doing it!" Shalk enjoys his nursery, his home town, and the people who continue to help him.

Blue Grass Farms

Anderson, Indiana, is a Midwest town of 57,000 which has become a bedroom community for the more well-known sister town of Indianapolis, approximately 40 minutes away. This town has seen several dramatic economic changes during its history, with major corporations coming in, setting up a nice workforce utilizing the talent of the town and its people and then exiting. Even with the adverse side effects that erratic economic stability can bring to a community, the one stabilizing factor among the ups and downs of the town's history is the dedication of the city fathers and its level-headed residents to pick up the pieces and go forward with a plan and with pride. Anderson did just that and last April was proudly included in Forbes magazine's list of the 100 best small places for business and careers. Blue Grass Farms was started in 1968 by Harry Stoner.



He affectionately named the farm after one of the grasses he grew. In 1979, however, Stoner decided to retire and placed a "For Sale" sign on his sod farm.

A young Anderson native who graduated from the local Highland High School always wanted to own his own business. Brent Shalk enjoyed basketball and baseball in school, but was more focused on his career goal. After high school graduation, he entered the Anderson workforce as a laborer for a local sod company, Warren's Turf Nursery. Shalk shares it was here that he learned the nursery industry and about business. During his eight years with this company, he was assigned different job posts in a variety of places with his last title being State Manager. But, in 1979, the "For Sale" sign on Blue Grass Farms became "Sold" and Brent Shalk excitedly moved back to his hometown of Anderson and owned his own business!

Shalk walked into his new adventure with a systemic game plan. He immediately began to transition the farm from a sod operation to a full scale nursery as he saw more opportunities in the nursery business. Additionally, as he was growing his new business side with plants, he also had a strategic plan to grow the nursery with quality people who would help him reach goals. He totally retired the sod side of the nursery in 1987, focusing on new varieties of plants and growing systems. The 500 acre container and field grown nursery grows shade and ornamental trees, shrubs, Evergreens and conifers. In the 2 acres of green houses, he grows his perennials, native material, vines, and custom products. It is here that he focuses his propagation component so he can control both the quantity and quality of his product. His nearly two hundred stock and products are constantly being evaluated and changed as the market changes and customer

requests are made. Yearly, he introduces ten to twenty new plant varieties, while he phases others out. He is proud of his growing leadership team; Mickey Gaw and Ryan Stowe. These two managers monitor the all of the plants and the sales lot. They are on top of the customer requests and all of the growing angles and systems available to make the nursery more efficient.

His is equally proud of his office team. They set the standards. They know the expectations and are constantly raising the bar for their job roles and themselves. He said, "It is a great team to work beside!"



Blue Grass Office Staff and Owner

Front Row: June Riser, Beth McKee, Nicole Cottrell

Back Row: Ted Blodgett, Brent Shalk

Hallmark of Business is Service

The mission of Blue Grass Farms is to supply quality plant material to the horticultural trade at a fair price, offer outstanding customer service and provide a delivery service that meets the specific needs of the customers. But, this nursery team specializes in customer SERVICE. Shalk's gentle, calm and fostering attitude has made service the hallmark of his business. Just as he was mentored years before, he believes that taking the time to mentor others reaps many blooms. One of the blooms is the longevity factor with employees. Of the nearly sixty employees on his team, he boasts that the majority of the workers have double digit years with him. Shalk attributes this longevity to "good attitudes, a pay rate in the upper end of the spectrum for his area, and we all come together for a common purpose that bonds us. We all get along well together." Because of the stable workforce at Blue Grass Farms, Shalk and his team are able to deliver "outstanding" service to their customers. "We are able to deliver a wide range of material on short notice. We have eight company owned trucks and can deliver within the state on a one day notice and throughout the states of Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa and Minnesota with a three day notice," he continues. Last year we made 1,600 deliveries matching the quality of the material with the quality of the service. "We deliver 70% of what we sell. We have to be forever ready with the availability of product, the quality of the material, and our service approach."

**"It's a great team to work beside."
Brent Shalk**

Opportunities to Help are Endless

Brent stays plenty active within his community. "I grew up believing that we have an obligation to help everyone around us. We should help people whenever and wherever we meet them. People are always needing help somewhere, you do what you can do. It keeps me busy all the time." Sandra, Brent's wife, and their six children also take an active civic role in Anderson's civic organizations. Brent is the Chairman of the Board for Anderson's Operation Love organization. This multi-demonational ministry provides counseling assistance and food bank services for families in their town. Also serving on the Anderson Tree Commission, Brent aids the Parks Department as they work toward making their great town greener. Brent enjoys his work as an Elder in his church, but on Sunday afternoon you will probably find him on the golf course! Shalk and his family and nursery family are major players in keeping the town of Anderson "a city on the move."



**Production Managers
Ryan Stowe, Mickey Gaw**

In His Words. . .

Brent encourages his team of professionals to join and become active in the state and national industry organizations, just as he does. By doing so, he believes that he and his staff can better understand the customer, they have a better opportunity to participate in legislation, and they have many opportunities to see employment options within the industry. Brent believes that "we must change with the times." "We have to continue to find ways to satisfy the customer and maintain a good business sense." He said the opportunities are limitless for our industry. As he reflects over the past thirty years, he says, "I've seen how technology has changed our business. The computer aids in the business. There are more farming machines and equipment which can and do make our job easier and the end product better, but I still believe that a business is only as strong as the people who work there."



Bring Your Own Bag

Finding ways to make a positive impact and continue our steady effort toward making the environment more eco-friendly can be simple—as simple as a visit to the grocery store, that is. When checking out and asked by the bagger, “Paper or Plastic?” we can respond with “Neither!” The grocery store bagging trends and options are slowly, shifting to a customer produced BYOB (Bring Your Own Bag) reusable eco-friendly bag system.

Paper bags were the traditional packaging choice at grocery stores across our country until the lightweight, but sturdy and durable design of plastic bags were introduced in 1977. The stores were happy to offer this alternate packaging option because it was less expensive for them, required less energy to make and recycle, and trees could be left standing. This convenient packaging tool is used for 80% of groceries bagged in the U.S. today. However, in recent times, environmental cost concerns and issues about the continued use of non-biodegradable plastic bags have begun to surface, which has ended with some municipalities taking legislative action by banning non-biodegradable bags at grocery and drug stores. Law makers are raising questions about their biodegradability, the rising cost of oil, the petro byproducts needed to manufacture them, the negative impact on the natural wildlife, especially marine, and finally the littering element. San Francisco was the first United States city to ban non-biodegradable plastic bags used in grocery and drug stores within the city when it passed its legislation in March, 2007. Legislators felt this ban on non-biodegradable bags would raise public awareness regarding negative effects on our environment, help reduce consumer bag consumption, and act as a constant reminder for shoppers to care for the environment, thus promoting a healthier Mother Earth. Similar legislation is being considered



by other cities such as Boston, New York City, Steamboat Springs, Portland, Oregon, and Baltimore Maryland, just to name a few.

With the passage of this ban on non-biodegradable bags, the burden of providing acceptable bagging options fell on retailers. They have responded with many eco-friendly suggestions. The retailers are providing bag recycling centers, (which allows the plastic bags to be recycled into other products such as decking, piers, posts, fencing, and even into other bags), recyclable paper bags, bioplastic bags, reusable shopping bags, and the retailers are taking a leadership role in educating consumers. Bioplastic bag manufacturers are beginning to appear and we can now find their environmentally friendly biodegradable bags being made from corn polymers, potatoes, soy, corn starch and other products, such as cane sugar and vegetable oils.

Education with consumers, believe the retailers, is the real key to helping our environment, though. The Institute for Lifecycle Environmental Assessment supports the idea of consumer education as well. They are quick to point out that both of the traditional bagging options—paper and plastic have obvious sidebars—felling 14 million trees yearly to meet the U.S. bagging demands, or using 12 million equivalent barrels of oil each year to manufac-

ture our bagging needs can be blunted. Conversely, in recent years the paper industry is re-emphasizing that their products are not only highly recyclable but renewable and sustainable as well.

Already we are seeing many consumers wising up to this new approach at the grocery store check out counters. Personally produced re-usable canvas bags, backpacks, crates, boxes, insulated bags, or other ingenious forms of bagging possibilities are becoming both fashionable and the norm.

Grocery and drug stores are selling their own reusable bags complete with their store logo or eco-friendly phrases attached. Designers, too, are quickly touting their newest eco-friendly bag fashion designs. However, these bags do come with a sometimes hefty price tag. Green Bags, as they called, can be purchased for as little as \$1.50 each, but the average cost for a reusable Green Bag is about \$19.00. The Designer bags however, are quite pricey. Stella McCartney's sequined eco-friendly bag runs about \$495.00, while Hermes has designed a check-out line show stopper made of silk that will fold into a wallet-size calf skin carrying case, for \$1,000. Other designers are offering their personal positive environmental statements which will showcase shortly.

Indeed, the bagging options are limitless; folks are beginning to better manage their trips to the grocery store and are remembering to BYOB! After all, didn't we make the shift from full service care at the gas pumps to self-pumping?



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Design Summer Picnics and Make Memories



Summer and picnics just go together. They are an easy and fun way to spend time with family and friends, connect with a favorite spot (like the beach, the mountains, the museum, or Grandma's), and just relax!

Your picnic can be as simple or as elaborate as you plan it. Picnics can be themed, have special activities attached, or nothing special added except the people you choose to share the time and food. What is better on a hot summer day than being with friends and grilling a giant steak at a state park grill or eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on a blanket by a tree near a river while finishing that favorite book?

Some wonderful, cherished childhood memories come from the family reunion picnics at the Grandparents every July 4th. These picnics brought family together from all parts of the country. The all day affair was captured in a variety of fun activities. Aunts prepared the cold picnic food favorites, the men were always centered by the grill carefully flipping the burgers and turning the hotdogs, older children had a healthy game of baseball going on in the field, while the younger ones were engaging in water hose fun around the swimming pool. Cousins would lead adventure hikes

and journeys where we picked berries, talked about the nature and natural plant life found along the trail, or sometimes we simply counted the cars on the train that passed us as we hiked our trail. There was always an activity table with a finished product take away, a board game center with games like Clue and Monopoly, and plenty of bikes, some two wheelers, for tooling around the property. It seemed that life just didn't get any better than this! But, the most fun of the picnic was making the homemade ice cream. With Grandpa in charge, several flavors were prepared—vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, peach, and of course, a yearly mystery flavor, such as cherry, lime, or honey. The original hand-crank ice cream machines were brought out from the shed, dusted off, bags of ice were brought in, and the fun began. Each grandchild had to take his turn sitting on top of a burlap bag placed on the ice while an uncle turned the crank. When our turn was finished, our bottoms were frozen and our pants were wet! At day's end, however, in conjunction with the explosion of the beautifully colored fireworks, we would all enjoy the delicious bowl of multi-favored frozen cream. Such tasteful memories!

Picnics are a special way to bring people together, find time to relax, and appreciate ordinary food prepared for a special moment! As you prepare for your July 4th fun, design your picnic and make some cherished memories. Try this custard type peach ice cream made with diced peaches, eggs, and vanilla. Have Fun! And, Happy Birthday America!

Homemade Peach Ice Cream

2 cups sugar	2 tablespoons vanilla
¼ cup cornstarch	4 cups whipping cream
¼ teaspoon salt	4 cups milk
4 eggs beaten	2 ½ cups crushed peaches, sweetened to taste

- Combine sugar, cornstarch, and salt in top of double boiler; Gradually blend in milk; Cook over hot water, stirring occasionally for about 12 to 15 minutes, or until thickened; Stir in a small amount of the hot mixture into the beaten eggs
- Return the egg mixture to the pan with remaining hot mixture
- Cook over hot water, stirring constantly, for 4 to 5 minutes, until it is about as thick as pudding; Chill thoroughly, about 3 hours
- Stir vanilla and cream into the chilled mixture
- Pour into a 1-gallon ice cream freezer; Freeze according to manufacturer's directions
- Remove dasher and stir in crushed or pureed sweetened peaches; Repack ice cream freezer with 1 part rock salt to 6 parts crushed ice and let ripen for 2