

Matterhorn Remains True to its Roots

Cultivating its unique brand as a retail garden destination with a family atmosphere makes Matterhorn Nursery Inc. our choice for Retailer of the Year.

09/29/09

When fishing in the ponds of Rockland County, New York with Ronnie Zebrowski during their teen years, Matt Horn said he thought the place would make a great place for a nursery. After Matt completed college with a degree in horticulture and landscaping, he married Ronnie. In 1981, the couple purchased their first 17 acres of forestland, upon which they built Matterhorn Nursery Inc., in the exact location where they fished as youths.

[Click here to view slideshow.](#)

Family-owned and -operated, Matterhorn Nursery Inc. grew from a 17-acre wholesale plant nursery to a 38-acre, full-service retail garden center featuring elaborate landscape and garden displays and four specialized divisions: Growers of Quality Plants - greenhouse operations and growing The Gardens and Special Events - 12 acres of display gardens for weddings, tours, school trips and more Landscape Design, Installation and Maintenance - a full-service design/build company that includes fiberglass pool installation and ongoing maintenance clients Garden Center and Shopping Village - a full-service garden center with several shops, including Aquatic Center, Antiques, NY State Wine Shop, Garden and Gift, Pet Boutique, Bird Supplies and Furniture.

The pond and water garden lifestyle remains central to each display garden at Matterhorn Nursery. The water feature display space includes an outdoor lotus and waterlily garden, stone koi ponds and an indoor pond with statuary, fountains, koi, lotus, waterlilies and other water plants.

Operational and stationary fountains serve as the focal point of many of the outdoor displays. To avoid detracting from the displays, the Horns store all piping, fittings and other supplies in built-in, ceiling-height bins to provide ample space for the pond lifestyle without sacrificing valuable retail space.

Sponsored by

Franklin Electric's Little Giant PondWorks sponsored the Water Garden News Retailer of the Year competition. Franklin will award Matterhorn Nursery Inc. a \$1,500 credit toward its products.

Franklin Electric has produced high-quality industrial pumps, filters and accessories for more than 50 years and brings its knowledge, experience and quality to the recreational water gardening and outdoor living marketing through its Little Giant PondWorks program, according to the manufacturer. Visit www.littlegiant.com or call 888-956-0000 for more information about the Little Giant PondWorks program and products.

Congratulations to Matterhorn Nursery Inc. for earning the title of Retailer of the Year 2009. The Horns plan to move Aquatic Center to the front of the Garden Center next to the natural ponds that run through Matterhorn Nursery. "This major renovation will result in a main attraction that will draw more customers, provide year-round interest and create a more efficient operation," Matt said. "Electricity and water are expensive. Ecologically sound practice is my goal."

To maintain a competitive edge in the new economy, Matterhorn Nursery hired an outside consultant to help evaluate its business marketing strategies. By objectively examining Matterhorn Nursery's target market, Matt said they discovered that their customer appeal proved broader and more diverse than originally thought.

Because the business offers products ranging from specialty dog items to New York State wines, Matterhorn Nursery unknowingly had been cultivating a brand for many years, Matt said. They began streamlining their logo and all promotional and marketing materials to further define and consciously brand Matterhorn Nursery as a garden center as well as a family destination.

Building on the family-owned business foundation, Matterhorn Nursery's customer service and daily operations style present customers with a distinctly personal atmosphere, Matt said. Employees learn Matterhorn Nursery's history and philosophy. Matterhorn Nursery encourages staff to grow professionally by attending training sessions, seminars, conferences and industry trade shows. This investment translates into increased employee morale and a higher standard in customer service, Matt said.

Matterhorn Nursery also is known for its active community involvement. During the company's early wholesale years, Matterhorn regularly donated plants to Meals on Wheels and other local nonprofit organizations.

With an established tradition of giving back to the community, Matterhorn Nursery continues to donate plants, gift certificates and gift baskets to causes they find worthwhile. Reflecting Matterhorn Nursery's growth, opportunities to contribute expanded, especially in the realm of education.

Matterhorn At-A-Glance

Location: 227 Summit Park Road, Spring Valley, NY 10977

Owners: Matt and Ronnie Horn

Size: 38 acres, 10,000 square feet facility

Employees: 20 full time, 15 part time, 20 seasonal

Years in business: 28

Products: Amphibians, pond fish, aquatic plants, gifts, pond equipment and supplies.

Services: New installations, educational seminars, product and equipment maintenance and delivery

Matterhorn Nursery offers annual school tours for students from nursery school to Grade 5 in the tri-state area of New York. When the children arrive at Matterhorn Nursery's 10,000 square foot facility, they walk along and explore the Matterhorn Environmental Trail, an interactive educational tour that introduces them to the gardens, woodlands, natural ponds and greenhouses on the property.

Field trips to Matterhorn Nursery include a hayride to visit Animal Friends, a snack and a miniature pumpkin. As a direct marketing opportunity, the company gives each child an educational handout that lists Matterhorn Nursery's upcoming events and information.

Each fall, Matterhorn Nursery attracts visitors of all ages for its annual October Fun Fest, a 3-day festival with family activities, attractions and entertainment from live music for children to wine tasting for adults. As part of Matterhorn Nursery's recycling efforts, the event includes an environmental education fair with workshops and demonstrations led by experts in composting, recycling and conservation.

In 2007, Matterhorn Nursery received designation as a Certified Wildlife Habitat from the National Wildlife Federation. The designation reflects the company's environmental commitment by providing food, water, shelter and space to raise young into each of Matterhorn Nursery's displays. University of Kansas recognized Matterhorn Nursery in 2008 as an official Monarch Station for the migratory butterflies. See accolades for a complete list of awards and recognition received by Matterhorn Nursery.

As part of its environmental commitment, Matterhorn Nursery actively participates in recycling and sustainability efforts. Matterhorn Nursery serves on the county's WasteWise Group, in partnership with the Rockland County Solid Waste Authority and Rockland Business Association's Sustainability Panel. Matterhorn Nursery also participates in Earth Day information sessions at the local community college and supports the Keep Rockland Beautiful campaign.

For two years, Matterhorn Nursery partnered with United Water, its local water provider, to offer a \$5 certificate in United Water's Annual Conservation Guide, which is inserted in the local paper and distributed to area stores and businesses. The certificate invites the public to visit Matterhorn Nursery to learn more about xeriscape gardens, rain gardens and other sustainable methods of preserving natural resources in the area.

In looking toward the future, Matt said he is eager to embark on Matterhorn Nursery's Aquatic Center renovation as well as a project to reduce and streamline inventory. "There's no way around it," he said. "Matterhorn has an excessive number of SKUs."

The Horns also plan to expand Matterhorn Nursery's existing recycling program, build a recycling kiosk, provide additional discounts to customers for their refill program and increase their organic soil line, organic lotions, compost offerings and tools that carry the Matterhorn brand. According to Matt, efficiency and sustainability remain the long-term goals.

Matterhorn Nursery's Aquatic Center generates the most profit because of the repeat-business nature of pond care, Matt said. Besides simple maintenance products such as pumps and filters, the top sellers with water garden enthusiasts include fish, aquatic plants, fish food, water quality enhancers and fish remedies.

Matt said he maintains his National Association of Pond Professionals membership for networking opportunities and discussions with colleagues on potential strategies to increase pond and water gardening sales. See memberships for a complete list of Matterhorn memberships.

"Business has been steady this year," Matt said. "Sales are flat, but these are not normal times. I consider steady sales a victory in light of the current economic climate."