

Windermere Garden Centre celebrates its 30th anniversary



LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION by Windermere Garden Centre crews is featured at cottages and homes throughout Muskoka. (Photo courtesy of Windermere Garden Centre)

By Sarah O'Donoghue

This summer marks a proud milestone for the Emmons family, who has been working hard for the last 30 years at Windermere Garden Centre to provide unique plants and flowers for Muskoka cottagers and residents. The family is thanking their loyal customers over the Canada Day weekend with product specials, cake and refreshments.

Just as the winding roads that lead to the garden centre are laden with Muskoka history, the Emmons family's horticultural experience extends back three generations. Now owned by Rick and Colleen Emmons, the business is always in motion with the help of many family members.

The family's extensive horticultural knowledge began in the Niagara region, where Rick and his four siblings grew up.

Their love for plant cultivation was inspired by their parents, Joan and Marshall Emmons, who had taken over Marshall's father's greenhouse business.

Frequent weekend trips to visit relatives in Severn Bridge brought back childhood memories for Marshall and Joan. Marshall had vacationed at his father's cottage in Sprucedale as a child, while Joan spent part of her childhood living in Wasdell Falls, near Washago. As the family once again fell in love with Muskoka's magic, they decided to start a small greenhouse business near Windermere. Initially, by doing local planting jobs, the Emmons family began buying and growing plants in two small greenhouses.

Today, 30 years later, their garden centre has grown to 32 plus staff members, two landscaping crews, three garden maintenance crews, two annual planting



OWNERS Colleen and Rick Emmons are proud to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their family-run Windermere Garden Centre. (Photo by Sarah O'Donoghue)

crews and one barging crew, all of which operate out of the largest indoor garden centre in Muskoka. The nursery features 15 greenhouses, a garden accessories store, and rows upon rows of vibrantly coloured perennials, annuals, herbs, shrubs and custom-designed planters.

"Whether it's plants or garden accessories, we always try to offer unique products that no one else has," says Rick.

"Just open any magazine featuring Muskoka cottages and there we are... our plants, our custom planters and our landscape construction."

Over the years, the business has grown to offer delivery by cube van, boat or barge. The company's landscape construction crews design beautiful landscapes with natural Muskoka granite flagstone patios, paths and stone step staircases interspersed with perennial and shrub plantings. The annual planting crews add splashes of colour to ground beds and planters everywhere, which keeps their maintenance crews hopping all season long.

Despite its changes over the years, the garden centre's small-town, country charm and family-oriented service are still the company's top priority. Because of this, loyal customers who first visited when the nursery opened in 1976 still return year after year.

"We are just one street off the main street," says Colleen. "For customers to make the trip out here, we have to offer unique plants they can't get elsewhere — it's worth the drive."

Another unique aspect at Windermere Garden Centre is the family's technique of planting and growing 85 per cent of their own plants from seed to pot. They grow their plants in three or four stages



WORKING WOMEN: Sharon Timms peeks out from behind her mother, Joan Emmons, beside one of the garden centre's rows of beautiful flowers. (Photo by Sarah O'Donoghue)

to continually provide fresh stock for customers throughout the summer and into late August.

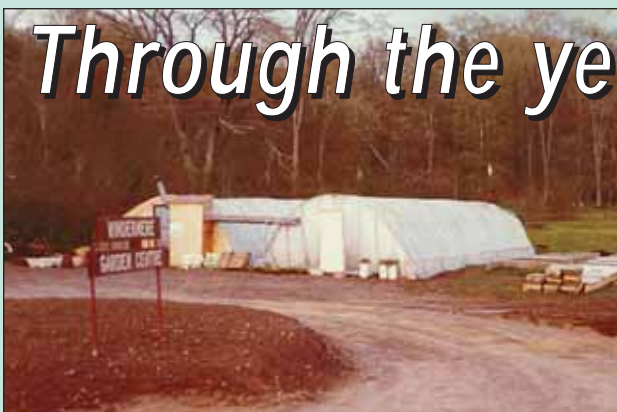
"We take great pride in the extra care we give our plants," says Sharon, Rick's sister who manages the office with his mother Joan.

It is with a hearty plant selection, professional gardening advice, an array of gardening tools, bird baths, soil products and flowers that Windermere Garden Centre continues to impress after 30 years. While the business is growing to suit gardening trends and customer needs, the family history that is woven deep into its roots remains as a centerpiece to its success.



ONE HAPPY FAMILY: Colleen and Rick Emmons (left) stand with Rick's father Marshall, his mother Joan and sister Sharon. The Emmons are third-generation horticulturalists who have been running the Windermere Garden Centre for the past 30 years. (Photo by Sarah O'Donoghue)

Through the years...



IN THE BEGINNING: Windermere Garden Centre started with only two greenhouses when they opened in 1976. Currently, the nursery has grown to feature 15 greenhouses on the property. (Photo courtesy of Windermere Garden Centre)



1977: The garden centre's first glass greenhouse was built so horticulturalists could grow plants all year long. (Photo courtesy of Windermere Garden Centre)



BARGE DELIVERY: Landscape crews unload plants from the Windermere Garden Centre barge. Delivery of products by barge is popular in Muskoka where cottagers and residents have gardens on their islands. (Photo courtesy of Windermere Garden Centre)