

concession

NEWS

UPDATE



AN INDUSTRY PROFILE – PETER BURKS



In this edition of Concession News we speak with Peter Burks, Garden Centre and Regional Manager for The Garden Centre Group and GCA Chairman. We discuss the changes to the Horticulture industry and how Concessions are contributing to the development of modern day, Garden Centre Retail.

How did you get started in Horticulture?

I have been in the industry for over 30 years, I got into Horticulture as my parents were farmers and I always enjoyed the growing side. I have a degree in Horticulture from Bath University and started in garden retail immediately after I left, working within what you would call a market garden with my parents.

Do you have a typical day and how do you balance the responsibilities of Garden Centre Manager and Regional Manager for The Garden Centre Group (TGCG) and GCA Chairman?

I don't ever really have a typical day. As Garden Centre Manager of Jacks Patch Garden Centre I have day to day responsibilities required to manage a site. As a Regional Manager I have a number of different responsibilities which covers the operations of a number of sites and that makes my role within TGCG a varied one. As GCA Chairman I am called upon to consider projects on a more 'industry wide' basis so it requires a different thought process.

What changes do you see happening within the industry over the next 10 years?

I see the horticulture sector being the leaders of the sustainability agenda. We are an integral part of the drive to improve sustainability and should therefore be seen as its pioneers. It is important for the sector to promote that the 'garden is a lifestyle.' Whether it be the gardener who gardens all year round, in any weather, to someone who wants to enjoy sitting in their garden without having to work at it, people get enjoyment from plants and gardening in varying amounts. The horticulture experience can be as basic as someone walking in their local park in the sunshine. We therefore, need to recognise that this experience can be as simple or active as you like, but the industry should be seen as part of people being able to enjoy their free time. Horticulture as a whole should therefore, be seen to be promoting this feeling of well being.

“The industry should be seen as integral to anyone being able to enjoy their free time.”

Since your Chairmanship started with the GCA you have already implemented a lot of change, how have you managed this?

Under my chairmanship of the GCA I was keen for all of the governing bodies to work together as ‘one industry.’ We were keen to work closer with the HTA because in the past we had been doing a lot of similar initiatives but separately. The GCA is very much focused on garden retail, with the HTA taking a more overall view of the industry.

What initiatives do you, with both the GCA and within The Garden Centre Group have in place to combat seasonality within the industry?

The weather remains the most significant factor that affects our business. Within The Garden Centre Group and the GCA, we have been keen to negate the affects of the weather as best we can. In recent times the best ways to do this have been to improve the restaurants and introduce other products, such as giftware. We also believe that a major benefit to attracting customers in bad weather comes from Concessions. In Concessions you have other interests and attractions for people to come and visit. Also, the rent Concessions pay, provides income to the site even if it snows! The partnership between the garden centre and the Concessions makes a much stronger retail offering for your customers. This therefore gives even more reasons to visit the centre, whatever the weather and makes the whole site much more interesting.

“In concessions you have other interests and attractions for people to come and visit.”

What Concessions have you seen or been involved with in garden centres that you would like to see more of?

I like to have Concessions that have expertise where garden centres do not. Pets and Aquatics are a good example of this but it could also apply to a range of other retailers such as clothing. These Concessions and also things like, machinery and hot tubs, provide expertise which would not usually be available from a garden centre. The technical expertise that concessions bring complements the horticultural, technical expertise of the garden centre staff. Finding staff to run these departments can often be quite difficult as garden centres may not always know what they are looking for. As it is their business, concessions will be able to recruit the right staff, with the specific skills to work in these departments and are better placed to be able to identify the right people. They are therefore bound to be able to run it better than we would. In addition to solving this recruitment headache, concessions also solve the cost headache of running these specialised areas of the business.

And finally, do you have a favourite concession you have seen in a garden centre?

I always prefer the more interesting concessions, for example I enjoy the Aquatics concessions. The zoo effect that the live fish provide is fascinating. I enjoy browsing these

stores and am impressed with the displays and colours I see. It provides garden centres with a very relaxing and interesting area.

For more information on how concessions can improve the day out experience within garden centres feel free to **contact us** info@firstfranchise.com – **01737 735041**

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