

SCNA Member Profile:

Nurseries Caroliniana

By Ellen Strother

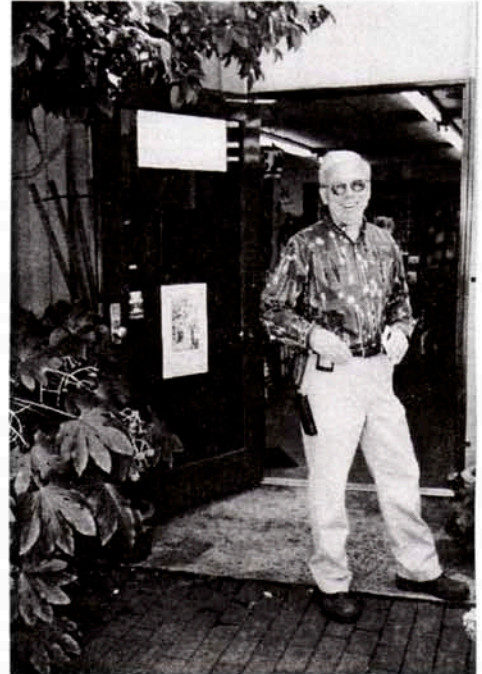
Clemson Extension Commercial Ornamental Horticulture Agent for Beaufort and Colleton counties

Horticultural aficionados, botanical gurus and specialty nurseries clamor for Nurseries Caroliniana plants. The business is small (relatively) but their plants are in red-hot demand. This North Augusta nursery's success may be attributed to effective niche marketing. They collect, propagate and market unusual, uncommon, rare plant material.

Ted Stevens, co-owner of Nurseries Caroliniana was born a plantsman. His sandbox served as his first propagation bed and weeds were his stock plants. He spent his allowance on plants and garden sundries and coerced younger brother Gerald to tend the burgeoning beds. No one was surprised when Ted earned his bachelor's and master's degree in horticulture at Clemson University and Gerald pursued the distinctly non-plant field of engineering.

In 1973, Ted convinced a decidedly skeptical Gerald to partner in starting a garden center on inherited North Augusta land. From the start they specialized in plants no one else carried. They sold Japanese Persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*) a Florida plant that Ted suspected would perform well in South Carolina, Chinese Lacebark Elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*), and little-leaf forms of Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum* cultivars), to name a few.

The wholesale division of Nurseries Caroliniana was born in the early 80's. Local and Atlanta landscape and nursery demands called for this business expansion. The retail garden center today remains under the management of Gerald, while Ted now oversees the wholesale operations.



Gerald Stevens manages the retail garden center

(continued on page 37)

ACADIAN PEAT MOSS LTD.

for

Quality, Reliability, Service

Lameque, New Brunswick, Canada

CALL

Bill Duffee

36 years serving nursery & greenhouse growers

1-800-922-1482 FAX 843-662-1475

SCNA Member Profile:

Nurseries Caroliniana

(continued from page 33)

Wholesale Division

Today, Nurseries Caroliniana is 50% wholesale, employs nine full-time and up to ten part-time employees. Stevens claims employees are talented die-hard plant lovers who love the variety of tasks, enjoy fraternizing with plant masters who drop by and usually spend their paychecks on plants.

Plant selection is 2/3 woodies and 1/3 perennials. Container sizes run from one to ten gallon sizes and occupy 12 acres. The largest dollar item is *Clematis armandii*, an evergreen clematis. They move 3,500 units of this vine each year. More hydrangeas are sold than any other plant. Forty-four different *Hydrangea* species/cultivars are listed in the 1999 catalog. The wholesale division is growing at 30% per year.

Rare plants appear in both containers and the landscape at Nurseries Caroliniana wholesale. Promising display plants being considered for market include *Beschorneria septentrionalis*, a shade loving yucca-type perennial with bright red flower stalks and a clumping *Trillium* (see photo) gathered from the Savannah River basin.


Plants are propagated in one of four houses and Nurseries Caroliniana employs a full time propagator. Propagation is challenging, as many of these plants have not been produced in mass before. Stevens credits the Internet with helping his propagator discover many reproduction secrets.

University of Georgia Professor and internationally recognized plantsman Michael Dirr is a frequent visitor at Nurseries Caroliniana and often drops off recent plant acquisitions from his travels for Ted and his crew to graft, propagate or trial. The late Dr. J.C. Raulston took an active interest in the nursery as well and was a positive influence. Prior to his death, Raulston encouraged Stevens to expand the nursery to include mail-order sales. Stevens is planning to implement mail order sales in the near future.

(continued on page 38)



Wholesale propagation at Nurseries Caroliniana



John Michaels
Wholesale Nursery

474 PENNYROYAL ROAD
GEORGETOWN, SOUTH CAROLINA
29440

Quality Container Grown Ornamentals
"Your South Carolina Source To Grow With"

Business Hours
Mon.-Fri. 8-4:30

Delivery Available

CALL TOLL FREE
1-800-456-0404

FAX (843) 527-0063

SCNA Member Profile: Nurseries Caroliniana

(continued from page 37)

Retail Garden Center

In the beginning, as well as today, ponds of Koi and cages of parrots add to customer enjoyment and therefore sales. The Stevens brothers enticed customers to buy uncommon plants by placing containerized plants around the base of a mature specimen. Sales were brisk until a tornado destroyed several specimens. The power of their former displays became evident as sales of some plants came to a grinding halt.

Retail sales have succumbed to the pressures of nearby Wal-Mart and K-Mart. Shovels, sod and most chemicals are now gone from the sales floor. Sales remain brisk at Nursery Caroliniana due to the increasing collection of unusual plants. The chain stores can't compete with Nurseries Caroliniana's knowledgeable retail sales staff many of whom are SCNA certified nursery professionals. Sales are also stimulated through displays of mature specimen plants.

Gerald's congenial personality and plant problem diagnostic skills assure continued success for this retail nursery. Tour groups visiting the wholesale nursery regularly visit the retail garden center to purchase collectible plants. The future holds additional challenges for the retail center as highway expansion threatens to claim 2/3 of the existing parking area.



Nurseries Caroliniana retail garden center has paved walks and mature plant material on display

The Rare Plant Phenomenon

The wholesale catalog includes over 1,000 different plants. Latin names, plant descriptions, container sizes and prices are easy to read. One hundred thirty-one new introductions are clearly marked in the catalog and include enticing features like *Myrsine africans* (African boxwood), *Parakmeria lotungensis* (Eastern Joy Lotus Tree) and *Magnolia* x 'Canary Yellow' and *M.* x 'Sundance', two yellow blooming magnolias from New Zealand.

Twenty-three upcoming offerings are listed in the back of the catalog and include a Variegated Harlequin Glorybower, received from J.C. Raulston just prior to his death, an evergreen dogwood (*Cornus kousa angustata*), and *Wisteria sinensis* 'Augusta's Pride'. This wisteria is from the original plant brought into America by the Berckmans of Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta. This remarkable vine blooms during the first year of growth and has an incredible fragrance.

Nurseries Caroliniana's niche is secure as demand exceeds supply. They cater to a discriminating southeastern audience and take pride in their international sales as well.



Ted Stevens with new Trillium



Feeding the fish is a customer attraction at Nurseries Caroliniana garden center