



## Vic & Margaret Ball Internship Student Report

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I had the opportunity this summer to do my Vic and Margaret Ball Internship at Tagawa Greenhouses in Brighton Colorado. Tagawa is a large greenhouse producer that produces a large number of annuals, some perennials, succulents, and vegetables. With five different facilities spread throughout Colorado, New Mexico, and California they can produce young plants, liners, and pre-finished product. During my time with the company I was moved through several departments within the company and could see how each department helped the business function. There were two other interns working alongside me for the first month of my internship which helped me acclimate to the greenhouse environment quickly.

At the beginning of my internship I learned about the merchandising done at Home Depot and saw how the final product was displayed at the stores for customers to purchase. Having previously worked in retail, staging and setting up displays to make the product more desirable was familiar to me. I was a bit surprised to learn that the damaged plants were thrown away. One instance that stuck with me was when I went around various stores within my assigned district to assess hail damage and having to take inventory of our loss. Throwing away so much product was eye opening as to how much waste the greenhouse industry can produce. From my two weeks in merchandising I could see how quality inventory played a key role in consumer purchasing. I was also able to practice my plant identification skills and help customers find plants that suited their needs. The next week I spent at the Tagawa Garden Center, which is a separate entity from the greenhouse. At the garden center, I saw how the retail ready side of greenhouse production was run. The first few days were spent getting to know the different areas of the company and how they contributed to the flow of the company. The department I found myself most attracted to was events and outreach. It was nice to see how a garden center took the time to invest in their community.

To understand the wide scope of the company I was sent down to the facility in New Mexico. Starting my greenhouse experience in New Mexico was unique and interesting to experience. I was primarily in the succulent area, because I had expressed an interest in working with them. Under the supervision of the assistant grower, Luis, I learned about the water regimen, propagation methods, fertilizing, and pest control used for succulents. The first two days I would do a walk through in the morning with Luis and he showed me what to look for when walking through a range. Afterwards I would go through and attend to what was needed i.e. irrigating, fertigating, identification, etc. Being able to help identify succulents helped me reinforce my previous knowledge. There were days where I would have to help space and move

mums. My favorite project during the internship was creating five different designs for succulent planters. The planters were used at Customer Days as displays to promote their succulent program. After spending two weeks in New Mexico I was sent back to Colorado to finish my internship.

Prior to beginning my internship with Tagawa Greenhouses I set goals for myself to accomplish. One of the goals I accomplished was strengthening and practicing my Spanish skills. The workforce was Spanish speaking and that was the primary language spoken. Giving direction and conversing in Spanish helped me understand the workers and be an effective lead. My knowledge from classes and previous hands-on experience helped me feel comfortable working alone and teaching others. There were times as a lead where I would need to ask for help and through doing that learned different skills i.e. irrigating, seeding, transplanting, etc. The company as a host was extraordinary by providing room and board free of cost and making accommodations when visiting their New Mexico facility. They also went out of their way to make sure I was accommodated and felt like part of the Tagawa family.

I will admit that I wasn't sure what I wanted to pursue after graduation, but this internship has opened my eyes to the variety of positions within a greenhouse. I had the opportunity to glimpse what a growing position within a greenhouse entails. From this experience, I learned a lot about myself and what I envision for my future. My passion lies in teaching others and working with underserved communities to teach them about horticulture and encourage them to pursue any passions they may have in the field. Whether this is through garden centers, extension, or intercity work I would like to expose others to greenhouse work and how it can be fulfilling. My overall experience with Tagawa Greenhouses was phenomenal and I appreciate having the opportunity to work with extremely knowledgeable growers and people in general. I would like to conclude by sincerely thanking the American Floral Endowment for allowing me to have this internship experience. I am extremely grateful for the support that I received and will highly recommend this opportunity to other students.