WELBY GARDENS GROWER INTERNSHIP SPRING 2015

Being awarded the Vic and Margaret Ball Internship through American Floral Endowment was such an unbelievable blessing. Next, realizing I would be packing up and traveling to Colorado for four months to work in a large production nursery was another incredible moment. Through this great opportunity and experience, I have gained abundant knowledge and am graciously shaping the beginning of my career future. Now, it is such a pleasure that I’m able to share this time with you.

To begin I want to describe and inform you some about the company I interned with, Welby Gardens. They are a large family owned production nursery center of over sixty-five years. Offering countless perennials, annuals, vegetables and grasses they are home to the brand Hardy Boy Plants, where they pride themselves on growing and providing hardier plants acclimatized to unpredictable weather.

Driving from a warm Texas Christmas Day into a snowstorm hitting most of Colorado definitely brought the start of new things. I began my internship in the first few days of January and spent most of my time shadowing the Head Grower. Through this I was able to see almost all the day-to-day operations occurring within the greenhouses. I was also able to observe the communication and management skills performed at this position. For example, we were involved in overseeing all the growing areas, pack, pot, and seed. The pack area consists of plants grown in packs on the ground, predominately containing pansies, violas, and petunias. The pot area is made up of the greenhouses harboring plants all grown in pots of varying sizes and all plug production. Plants such as dahlias, gerberas, salvia, etc were located in this area. The seed area is one large house holding numerous trays of varying plant species that we propagated through direct seeding. Each area has a lead grower and two to three growers to help maintain the crops of their area. The head grower supervises and helps, if needed, in all actions regarding these areas, such as determining insect and disease problems and creating spray and or drench lists and schedules. The same process goes for determining plant growth regulator needs of the crops and carrying out those actions. Trim and pinch lists are also needed regularly to maintain your area as well as basic watering needs and the manipulation of so by acclimatizing or forcing / holding the flowers. A few of the many jobs only performed by the head grower are making move lists (arranging and determining placement of newly planted crops with movement and consolidation of older crops), managing crew staff (prioritizing planting and move lists), and creating grower work schedule. I spent most of my first two months aiding in these tasks, as well as spending a couple days a week working on receiving and processing incoming cuttings that were to be propagated weekly. I also spent one day a week helping with inventory in making claims on any incoming plant material that didn’t make the shipment to Welby due to freezing or rotting etc. Although I enjoyed and learned so much in these first couple months of helping and observing, the real responsibility came when I transferred more into the grower portion of my internship.
Once my third month started, the Head Grower placed me into the pack area and had me interning under the lead grower of that area. Here is where I put what I had learned from school and the past two months of shadowing into practice. Granted all the growers of an area contributed to the whole area, the lead grower placed me in charge of one small house of pansies and violas. Through my dominance of this area, my lead grower was able to see if I was performing the appropriate way with watering, inspecting and treating of the crop as well as allowing for immediate guidance or correction if needed. This project was my favorite part of my internship. I really enjoyed the hands-on experience and seeing a crop go from start to finish under my control. It was the best way to learn as I saw the direct cause and effect of my actions with the crop. After a month in the pack area, I was switched into the pot area in order to gain experience there as well. Much like the pack area, all growers of the pot area helped all throughout but also had a few main houses under their control. I had a fairly large house containing mostly geraniums of different ages and various plugs. This was also a great learning experience as different crops have different requirements and even the same crop has different requirements at differing ages. Overseeing a greenhouse with a variety of crops and ages called for great focus to the plants at hand and learning their needs.

After those four months of fast paced learning in almost all areas of Welby Gardens, my internship met its conclusion. Yet happily that conclusion ended with an offer letter to become a full-time assistant grower. This offer was exciting in itself but more so it brought me a huge sense of accomplishment for the time I spent interning there this spring. As most interns would agree, internships can be a little nerve racking or scary at first because you aren’t sure what to expect. Yes, you’ve gone through school and learned a lot about what you might be doing but most likely you haven’t fully worked somewhere, doing all the things you’ve learned about in class. So walking into Welby my first day in January was pretty intimidating. What we forget is that the point of an internship is for learning, you aren’t expected to walk in knowing everything, you gain that knowledge through your time there so that when you walk out you feel confident and ready for a job in that field. That is exactly how I felt leaving Welby Gardens on my last day in May. I wouldn’t trade my time at this nursery for anything and I want to thank Welby Gardens and AFE again for the wonderful opportunity they provided me. I can guarantee the learning wont stop here.
In this picture I'm posing with the Welby sign of the Nursery’s new retail section.

In January, when I first began my internship, Cyclamen was the main crop filling two of the main houses (H & C).
These pictures, the Gerberas, Ranunculus, Mums, and Celosia all came from house L, where Welby was growing and maintaining their show material soon after I began my internship. This plant material was being grown and held for the Colorado Home and Garden Show in early February, in which Welby provides a large portion of plant material each year.
Each week Welby would receive numerous cuttings for their Hardy Starts plug production line. One of my jobs towards the beginning of my internship was to observe, take note, and pictures of damaged or missing cuttings in order to make claims to these companies. As you can see, here are a few of the pictures I took for this process.
These pictures are somewhat of a timeline of the pansy & viola house I was in charge of for a portion of my internship. They also display what the pack area houses look like.
Here is a picture displaying some of Welby's Hardy Starts plug production line in house M.

Here I am suiting up for a Bonzi drench.

Above are a couple pictures I took while watering, one of my main jobs later on in my internship duration.
My parents came to visit in the end of February so I toured them through Welby. My mom’s favorite was the Ranunculus crop in house C and my dad was fascinated by the boom technology in the houses containing young plugs.
The following pictures are just pictures I took throughout the work-day of pretty blooms or crops I saw or pictures of the house I was working in at the time.

Perennials in house J.

Begonias in house E.

Ranunculus in house C
Pretty Portulaca growing in packs in house H