

Life Lessons at Molbak's

As I talked to other students, professors, and people in the horticulture industry they stressed the importance of gaining new experiences through travel. One of my friends expressed to me that her biggest regret in college was not traveling.

I have been working with and studying under Dr. Gladon. He really got me thinking about the greenhouse industry and plant production. Under his recommendation, I applied for the Vic and Margaret Ball Scholarship/Internship program. As I applied for this program, Dr. Gladon asked me where I would like to go. The possibilities were endless, but I decided to go west. I had never been west



of Carroll, Iowa and I wanted to see what was out there. That wasn't the only reason though, I heard the horticulture industry in the Pacific Northwest was exceptional and I wanted to see how they do things.

When I started working at Molbak's in Redmond, Washington, I was a little overwhelmed. They had four acres of greenhouse along with even more acres of field production. The people were wonderful though. I had many coworkers with most of them speaking primarily Spanish. It was a lovely experience for me though,

because I could speak just enough to get by. My coworkers were glad that I was trying to speak with them so they started teaching me more Spanish!

My internship has been very interesting to say the least. While I was working in production, we received our first shipment of poinsettias. I was excited because we were working with unrooted cuttings, which I had never worked with before. My boss gave me the great experience of carrying out the whole process from cleaning and sanitizing the house the poinsettias were to be grown to organizing and heading a crew to stick the cuttings, to transplanting the cuttings to their final pot.

Quality is one of the main production goals at Molbak's. I spent some time pulling plants for orders. The Molbak's retail store in Woodinville, Washington sends an order over to the production area almost every day. It was



The wholesale hoop houses at Molbak's.

my job to help pick the plants, clean them, and price so they are ready for the retail customer. We also pulled orders for wholesale and large specialty orders. These tasks put choosing plants in a whole new perspective for me. I had to figure out what was acceptable to sell.

The wholesale yard is an important part of Molbak's. We have around 30 hoop houses filled with annuals, perennials and some woody plant material. There is also a 5 or so acre field for trees and shrubs. I learned a lot about presentation here. I worked at a floral shop with a small greenhouse before, but wholesale presentation was entirely different. The customers did not buy plant by plant they bought flat by flat. I was surprised by how few questions were asked on how to grow a plant, and how many times I was asked where a plant was located. It makes sense though because these are knowledgeable wholesale customers, not backyard gardeners.

Just before the fourth of July, Molbak's announced they are going to shut down the wholesale yard and production areas of the business. It was a huge shock. Over half of the workers were let go that day. We had a huge order to pull and get ready for retail, poinsettias that needed potted up, and plants to be watered. It was a really tough adjustment, but I was glad they were able to keep me on until I finished my internship.



Julia, the other intern, and I with the perennial production fields.

I truly believe everything happens for a reason. My experience at Molbak's has been very interesting to say the least. There have been many surprises, let downs, and triumphs! I have met many great people and learned a tremendous amount not only about the greenhouse industry, but also about the world, and myself. I suppose all that is left to say is thank you to everybody who helped me get to where I am today. Also, to anybody considering an internship, go for it! You never know what you may learn or what new paths will come of it.