

My Vic & Margaret Ball Internship Experience at Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise

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Growing up on a vegetable farm led me to pursue a career in Horticulture at the University of Wisconsin River Falls. As part of this undergraduate study, completing a college internship was mandatory. During my senior year I applied for the American Floral Endowment, Vic and Margaret Ball Internship and was selected as one of their candidates. After reviewing my goals with Debi Aker, AFE recommended me to Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise the nation's largest plug producer; where I would complete a six month internship. During this six month internship I worked within each department of the company at all locations with key focus on growing plugs and finished products. As a result of this internship my passion for the floriculture grew tenfold and now my goal is to peruse a career in floriculture.

Before arriving at Tagawa Greenhouse in Brighton, CO in early January, Bill Kluth of Tagawa Greenhouse had already developed a detailed six month schedule allowing me to participate in every aspect of production and shadow senior management position. The first week of this internship I participated in classes ranging from company history, moisture management, safety procedures and fertilizer programs. After completing these courses the next department was soils. During this time I participated in soil mixing and operated Ellegaard equipment. Through this I learned about the different media used and the purpose of each soil mix for production. Then I transitioned into the seeding department, where I participated in seed inventory, flat filling, seeding, and tray movement. After working in these departments, I saw the true benefits of lean flow practices. After the seeding department I was able to grow plugs for six weeks during peak plug season at Tagawa Foothill in Golden, CO. During the six week time period I was responsible for growing begonia, vinca, angelonia and pentas. This experience was an eye opener to the responsibilities of a grower. Through this I learned about implementing fertility practices for individual crop species to ensure crop quality specifications. I monitored and watered plants in timely manner based on changing environmental conditions and gained experience with PGR and crop movement in order to minimize loss of crop. Once the six weeks were over I went to Tagawa Southwest in Estancia, NM. During my time at Tagawa Southwest I was able to gain insight on the communication process between multiple locations. After one week at southwest I came back to the Brighton, CO location and participated in the quarterly inventory. Through the quarterly inventory, I learned the importance of keeping accurate inventory for accurate sales projection and bank statements. Following that was six weeks of growing finished products. During this time period I worked in a range that was not automated. This proved to be a great learning experience since I had to analyze crop movement for uniform growth. Along with that I had to monitor weather patterns daily to open up vents at the proper time. Other job duties include insect scouting, soil testing and grading. Through pest scouting, and soil testing I enhanced my knowledge of insect scouting and spraying practice to correct issues. Through soil testing I learned how to recognize plant

symptoms, read EC levels, and how to correct them. Through crop grading I gained insight on crop quality. Upon completing the six weeks of growing finished product, I spent one week merchandising at seven Home Depot stores. As a result of this, I was able to see the product leave with the end consumers, and demonstrate the ability to be a contributing member within a multicultural team environment. I also gained and understanding of sales and marketing. After participating in merchandising for one week, there was three weeks left of my internship. The only task remaining was shadowing the senior management.

During this time I shadowed Gary Schoneman in accounting. Through this I was exposed to all the financial aspects of the company; and this has motivated me to take accounting courses in the future. Next was Human Resources, where I shadowed June Tagawa. During this time June took me through the whole hiring process, layoffs, termination, pay role, 401K, benefits, training, and employee injuries. This was very beneficial and gave me a better understanding of Human Resources. The next department was shadowing Bill Kluth, Business Manager of Tagawa Greenhouse. During this time I learned about insurance, taxes, water laws, communication process, research, and development. Bill also developed an exercise where I had to start a greenhouse. I had to figure out the cost for greenhouse structure, heat, labor, crop selection, how many times crop were turned around, and calculate to see if the company was profitable. From this exercise I improved my understanding of running a business. Lastly I shadowed Randy Tagawa, CEO of Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise. Topics of discussion included strategic planning, company history, management process, decision making and business transition planning. This was a great opportunity for me since I was exposed to various job duties of Tagawa's CEO.

When I first arrived here at Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise, I was welcomed with great conversation and smiles from everyone. Bill Kluth went out of his way and took two days off to bring me to 3 out of the 4 facilities to introduce me to everyone in the company. Everyone from management positions to general labor were very enthused to meet me and went out of there ways train me in. Everybody was also very open to questions which made the communication process great. This made it easy to fit in as I transitioned my way throughout the company. Other staff went out of there way and took me out to tour Denver, attend baseball games, and other recreational activities. During my stay here, everyone spent so much time to get to know me that I felt like I was part of the team. They also offered free housing on location making everything easier while I was there. With everyone at Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise being very welcoming and the great staff educating me along the way, my internship was phenomenal. This internship has shaped my future goals, and now I want to pursue a career in floriculture. I highly recommend an internship with Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprise to any young horticulturist wanting to explore the floriculture.