

Pete Lind returns to (plant) roots at greenhouse

By Patsy Gincotta
Staff writer

When Pete Lind came back to Centerville to work in the family business, he joined quite a lineage. The Centerville Greenhouses was originally owned by his grandfather who had been a grower in Fargo, N.D.

"He got this place in 1972 at an estate sale," said Lind. "He had come to Centerville during one of those Aprils we sometimes have when an early spring makes everything beautiful and the days are sunny. He fell in love with the area. He was wholesale only and special-

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ized in terrarium plants. That was a big market once."

Lind and his siblings, two brothers and a sister, grew up learning the greenhouse business. But there came a time when the last place he wanted to be was a greenhouse.

"I went to the University of Iowa and studied anthro-

pology. I got involved with the writer's group there and loved it. I met Kurt Vonnegut once. I loved anthropology and made friends in that field, got scholarships through that department. I was the first undergraduate to sit in on a graduate workshop. I got in on a seminar with Chris Offutt, a faculty member of the writer's group. He was fantastic. The level of conversation in that group was fantastic. We met three hours a week and I loved it," Lind said.

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Pete Lind

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writers are obsessive/compulsive people by nature. I was a journalism major for a very short time, but got away from that. If I had time, I'd try sending out stories but the greenhouse takes a lot of my time. I write a lot of letters. I think letter-writing is a lost art. I'm not a fan of computers or email. The Internet is just a quick way to buy books."

Lind graduated in May 2003 and then attended graduate school as an English major at Central Missouri State University.

"I'd really like a formal English education," he said. "But I don't have time for that now."

While he was in graduate school he tried to find a job there in Warrensburg.

"I came across a little greenhouse and thought I could get a job, but ended up selling him geraniums from our greenhouse," Lind smiled. "That's the first time I'd ever paid much attention to how other greenhouses work. I have some ideas for the business and think I can have an impact, or at least

make a life in this field.

"I've got nothing else on the plate right now and whatever I'm doing, I like to do the best job I can. Who knows, I may go for a formal education in greenhouse management. Anthropology had a perfect sense of lost direction. I love the subject, loved to do the reading and write papers, and I guess it was the best place for me to make the most of four years of school. But what do you do with anthropology unless you want to teach?" Lind asked.

He is especially interested in Indian cultures such as the Incas and Aztecs. His interest is in plant domesticates.

"Potatoes come from the Andes. I like to learn where plants originated and how they were used. I'm really interested in agriculture as a whole. People devote their whole lifetime to that field. It's huge," he said.

Lind said working for his dad used to be a little aggravating.

"But now he's kind of slowed down and mellowed. He's still very much in charge of things like the crop timing, but I give input in the marketing and pricing. We do lots of landscap-

ing, plantings, hardscaping with walls and pavers, digging and plantings in rock, anything cosmetic around the house. It keeps us busy, especially in the spring when we work from 6:30 a.m. to 8 at night. My brothers Al and Andy work here, too. It's a real family business. We all like the seasonality and change in the work - the variety of things we do," he said.

Centerville Greenhouse is busy with its spring sales to wholesale customers. They have customers in Dubuque, Chicago, Kansas City, Quad Cities and all greenhouses looking to take on inventory. Lind said they are on the job now by 6:30 a.m. each day. It won't be long before customers will be planting gardens and having landscape projects done, then their hours will be longer.

He said most of what he knows about his work is from reading and watching what goes on at the greenhouse. He's had no classes in horticulture.

"You can learn a lot by reading and also talking to other greenhouse owners. There is a lot of information around all the time. In the greenhouse industry, it is competitive but everyone is

friendly. There is a tradition of pride and honesty in this business. Everyone works toward helping the industry thrive.

"We try to provide plants as healthy as possible so people get the best they can for their gardens. And when someone goes to buy a plant, they should get all the help and information they need to keep that plant in its best condition. Box stores that stock plants don't give them much care before they're purchased. They buy from huge plant companies that aren't real careful with their products. From the time they're delivered until they're purchased there is very little attention paid to the plants. If you want good products, you should go to places that know about them and take pride in what they sell."