

The history of the gnome “Gus” from his perspective



My adventure began in 2008 when Gary Epstein, owner of Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery allowed me to escape from the CNREF silent auction. Later the greenhouse folks and the nursery folks decided to pool their resources and CNREF became CHREF, but that is another story. He took me back to his nursery and told me he had big plans for me. He was going to auction me off so I could raise money for the research and education foundation. If his plan was successful, I could travel and visit some of the best nurseries and greenhouses in the state of Colorado. That sounded a whole lot better than spending my life in someone’s garden so I was in on his plan.

Later I learned that the money I could raise would go towards funding scholarships and horticultural research. I met two former scholarship recipients that very year since they worked at Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery. One was Scott Skogerboe, their propagator and highly respected horticulturist, and the other was Peter Mendicino who is presently their head container production grower. Both of these men told me that when they were back in school the money they got really helped them out on their path to become major contributors to Colorado horticulture. I learned one of the many research programs funded was the Multi Site Trials where CSU tested potential “new” plants in multiple sites around Colorado. One of the plants that came out of those trials was Hot Wings Maple. This program caught my attention because Hot Wings Maple was originally found right here at Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery and is now sold nation wide. I understand that there other

research programs that contribute towards the betterment of Colorado horticulture like drought studies, transplant studies and maintenance of the PERC facilities to name just a few.

Now back to my story. The following year Gary took me back to Denver for my first auction. After dinner he began auctioning me off. It was both an exciting and memorable time. It was scary since Pat Bailey of Bailey Nurseries was bidding & I was afraid I might have to go to Minnesota. I think Gary sensed my anxiety because he starting bidding against Pat and eventually outlasted him. PRAISE GOD. I am only 24” tall and I would have become buried in all the snow they get in Minnesota. I have one bad memory from that night. They took me to Ann, Gary’s wife and partner, and somehow I fell and broke my base. It didn’t hurt, but I was a mess. They took me back to Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery and Rick Miller, one of the new owners of Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery, and Peter Mendicino performed a masterful surgery and put my feet back onto the base.

During that second year, I was affectionately called Gnomey aka Gus and they took a lot of pictures of me hanging out around the nursery. At the end of the year they made a slide show of my year there. Then Gary took me and the slide show back to auction me off again and so my adventure continued. Over the course of the next 5 years I got to go to Arbor Valley Nursery, Alameda Nursery, Tagawa Greenhouses, Harding Nursery and Britton Nursery meeting lots of new friends along the way. Last year Gary bid on me again since it would be his last year in business and brought me back to Fort Collins Wholesale Nursery. I wonder where I get to go this coming year. It doesn’t really matter because I am sure it will be another great time.

I’m so glad I agreed to participate in Gary’s scheme. It has been a true adventure for me not to mention the tens of thousands dollars I helped raise for the foundation. I wonder which scholarship winner this year will become the next future industry leader and where I will get to spend the next year.