

Growing a dream

New Nursery opens in Central Lake

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CENTRAL LAKE — Earl Munroe hunches his big shoulders and brings his cupped hands up together as if he is cradling an invisible, fragile porcelain sculpture. He is imagining the reward he and his wife Myra derive from nurturing a dianthus flower from a tiny seed that has continued to mature and expand into a spectacular specimen.

With a focused look in his eyes, Earl expressed his emotion, "It's an amazing thing to watch a plant continue to grow and mature from a seed."

Myra added, "This new venture is the result of having a passion for what you love and loving what you are doing. It is very satisfying."

The Munroes have accomplished something they've always wanted by opening a nursery on their 32 acres in Central Lake at 1406 North Intermediate Lake Road.

The new venture will have 45 varieties of produce and 227 species of zoned-hardy perennials and ornamental grasses available for sale.

Opening their business is but one step in a carefully calculated process. Extensive product and process research along with market testing and feedback is at the base of the Munroes' business plan. They were encouraged



Photo by Jeffray Kessler

Earl and Myra Munroe are open for business at their new nursery on North Intermediate Lake Road in Central Lake.

last year by the response to their product at the Bellaire Farmers Market. The market was basically telling them that now is the time.

"From what people are telling us about our products, this is good timing, because they want to eat healthy and they need options to high food prices," Earl said.

Myra continued the impact of positive feedback.

"At last year's markets, we met tons of fun and nice people who encouraged us. More and more they want to know where their food comes from," she said. "The plants and produce we grow are of a premium quality, hand-seeded and propagated right here. There is no need to worry about preservatives."

The Munroes bring an effective combination of genealogy and "workology" to their

business. Arching along the branches of Myra's heritage on her father's side are names familiar to many in agriculture circles in the area: the Veldcamps (Ellsworth) and Purdys (Central Lake).

"Farming is in my blood," she said.

On the other hand, Earl has seen the major leagues of nursery management from the inside out and from the ground floor up, having worked for the mega greenery operation called Zelenka Nurseries in the Grand Haven area.

"I got a well-rounded look at the business, starting with an entry-level position and moving to inventory control," Earl said. "It was in their North Carolina operation that I got tuned into perennials."

A drive down the long plantway on the east side of Intermediate Lake Road takes

customers through pleasant wooded and planted sites that open onto garden plots and greenhouse facilities that are flourishing under wide-open skies and surrounded by woodlands. It is a veritable produce and perennial spa of sorts, where the care and nurture of the plants is obvious.

As examples, Earl points to where the Yukon Gold potatoes will be and the green beans. Myra indicates the plots of multiple varieties of lettuce and spinach, and they admit their dedication to care.

"We certainly have plans to grow, but we will always want to keep things small enough so that the plants get personal attention," she said.

Future plans include a market out by the road with several greenhouses that will be open for customers

to peruse.

"I want people to go away from here with high quality products and feel that they have more than they may have received elsewhere. We will sell only premium perennials and produce at very competitive prices."

Open May 3 in time for Mother's Day, the Munroe's forecast May 23 as the first date for produce. The month of May, plants of the 45 varieties of produce will be available. Once the veggies come on, they will even offer U-pick experiences for those interested in the ultimate in freshness.

Market plans will also include continued participation in the Friday Farmers Market in Bellaire.

Initially, hours will be Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. As the season heats up, the plan is to extend weekday hours to 7 p.m. Earl points out they are open to wholesale, landscaper and off-hour inquiries as well.

More information can be attained by phone at 231-675-1874 or by e-mail: munroe-farms@yahoo.com.

You are invited by the Munroes to share their enthusiasm for botanical goodness and reward. As Myra beckoned, "Come and grow with us."

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