

Dillon's Flowers

The Process of Growing Flowers at Dillon Floral as told to Patchwork by
Walt Deitrick

Interviewed by Makenzie Yordy in December 2007

Walt Deitrick began working at Dillon's Floral Corporation 25 years ago and has since worked his way up to the position of flower production manager. Deitrick has lived in Bloomsburg for 43 years. He attended Bloomsburg High School and the University of Maryland. Deitrick is married and has two children.

The story about Dillon's Floral begins in 1875 when the business first started. And although technology has changed significantly since then, the process of growing flowers has remained much like it was over 100 years ago.

"Any flower we're going to grow, the first thing you have to do is research it," says Deitrick. "I have to do all the background work to see whether or not we can sell it in our market area; what it takes to grow it as far as the environment that we would grow it in; how we would feed it; whether or not it would give us enough production to make money and get enough money for it once we grow it in our market and then I have to figure that all out to see if I can make a profit on it. If all that works, then we can grow it."

Deitrick himself started working in the flower business looking for a short term job. "I just applied for a job here. I had no intention on staying here as long as I have. At the time I was just out of college and you know it was a job, and here I am 25 years later."

Presently, Deitrick is all detailed hands-on with the business. He comes in each morning and finds situations that change almost daily. "I could end up putting out fires, if you will, handling small problems that have occurred; scheduling my work force this week, what they're going to do, researching new flowers to grow, buying the products we grow for the flowers, from the peat moss, soil, all the way to the plants themselves and the slings that we pack them in when we sell them."

But his job has never interfered with his connection to the history of Dillon's which originally was located on the hill where Bloomsburg University is located. "From there it moved down to the hillside behind here, off of Fifth Street. The old greenhouses used to be there, and then it moved down to this area that it is in now. Probably about the 1920's. It started out growing a lot of flowers here and shipping them by train. That used to be the big way to ship. Then as time has changed and trains were no longer a big way of shipping, we

started shipping in other ways and became more of a wholesaler to florists and smaller market areas. When we used to ship by train, we'd ship to cities all over the United States."

Dillon's has changed since Deitrick first started. "Well, at that time we were a really big rose grower. Now we're not such a big rose grower. We grow a lot of other things and that was about the only cut flower we grew at the time, and because of the way shipping has gotten worldwide, you can get things so quickly now by plane and whatnot. Most of the roses we buy now come from South America. They grow them so cheaply that I can't compete with them so we've downsized the number of roses that we do and we've expanded into other cut flowers."

Personally, Deitrick has had many memorial experiences in his job and with growing flowers. "You have lots of memories when you have been in a place this long. Nothing really comes off the top of my head. I mean we've had a lot of things, a lot of flowers through the years that have been used in many different ways - for United States Presidents, balls for presidents and everything. We've had a lot of famous people here to visit us; some of those people we've met and been able to come in contact with."

Today, Deitrick is looking forward to continued growth in an industry he obviously enjoys. "There's approximately 100 people employed by the company. We have this wholesale business in Bloomsburg, 'cause our growing is all done here in Bloomsburg, but we also have a wholesale house in Scranton and one in Allentown. Flowers get into your heart. They are so simple, yet they can make such a difference in our lives."