

Deep roots

Anderson Die and Manufacturing has been making nursery pots for five decades, still with room to grow

President George Anderson (right) and vice president Rick Anderson are guiding longtime container maker Anderson Die and Manufacturing into the future.

Anderson Die and Manufacturing

Founded: 1954, Maker of Anderson Pots brand plastic, injection-molded nursery containers, bands, trays and saucers, including a line of biodegradable containers.

Located: 2425 S.E. Moores St., Portland, OR (just off Hwy. 99E, McLoughlin Blvd.)

Key Personnel: George Anderson, founder and president; Rick Anderson, vice president

Contact: 503-654-5629, info@andersonpots.com

Web: www.andersonpots.com

By Curt Kipp

Every morning, George Anderson arrives at work around 7:45 a.m. and doesn't leave until 5:30 p.m. He's been doing this daily for 57 years, as the owner and president of Anderson Die & Manufacturing in southeast Portland.

The company was one of the earliest makers of plastic nursery pots, which began to replace used coffee cans after the end of World War II.

Anderson is fond of saying the company has never made a throwaway

pot. That may be the biggest reason the company has stayed successful through decades of rapid and dramatic change in the nursery industry.

Anderson pots feel beefy, not flimsy or liable to crack. They can be used again and again. Customers see the value and keep returning for more.

"We have a lot of people that come by in a pickup truck and pick up a stack," company vice president and George's son, Rick Anderson, said. "You don't have to buy a truck load or a container load from us. Our minimums are very low."

Deep roots

It's a company that hasn't forgotten its roots stretching back almost six decades.

George Anderson came of age as part of the post-World War II generation. As a young man, he worked first for Lockheed, then moved to Portland and was employed in a series of tool and die shops.

It was here he was introduced to plastic molding. He decided before long that he would be happiest owning his own business. He borrowed \$800 from his father — "I still have the check," he said — and used it to purchase a milling machine. That was the start of Anderson Die & Manufacturing.

The firm's first building was on Macadam Ave. in southwest Portland, near the present-day Buffalo Gap Saloon. Anderson started out by making tools, primarily. One of Anderson's

first customers was Gerber Legendary Blades. Anderson made the molds for their aluminum knife handles.

Another early product was a pill box, which was made for a Portland-based drug company. "They sold a weight-reducing tablet and a pep pill, both," George said.

Success with these products enabled George to make other molded products. One product of note was a plastic edge protector, used with steel shipping bands to prevent damage. They replaced steel edge protectors then in use, and are still Anderson's leading non-nursery product line.

After a few years in business, George became aware of opportunities in Oregon's growing nursery industry. Another company contacted him about making square flower pots. The initial pots were open on the bottom

— essentially, they were plastic bands. They mimicked the shape of wooden, stapled bands then in use.

"You had to make the bands without the bottom because growers were used to using them without the bottoms," George said.

Later versions added a cross-shaped piece of plastic on the bottom because that was easier to mold. The band pots are today made in 14 different sizes. "It's still one of our bigger products," he said. "We ship them all over the U.S."

Growers like the square pots because they allow more area for roots, yet more pots will fit in same space. This allows for more efficient use of space in greenhouses and on trucks.

In 1965, Anderson Die lost its railroad access on Macadam Avenue due to construction. George decided to move the business to a larger facility near the

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When George remarried, his wife Bobbi became involved in the business. They both worked long hours. "She took care of the office, and I took care of the molds," George said.

The company expanded about every five years. "We tooled up to satisfy the need for containers," he said.

All of the expansions were funded out of cash flow. "We just didn't want to borrow any money," George said.

Three years ago, after Bobbi passed away, George retired from the shop and now works in the office. He brought his son, Rick, on board as vice president of the company.

It was like coming home for Rick, who spent part of his youth running the plastic pot presses. As an adult, he worked outside the company, selling musical instruments.

The company remains pointed to the future. Several Husky Hyletric machines were installed at a cost of \$8 million, allowing the pot maker to boost its efficiency and quantity while keeping its trademark high quality.

"We think there's greater root growth with straighter sides and stacking lugs at the bottom that inhibit root circling," Rick said.

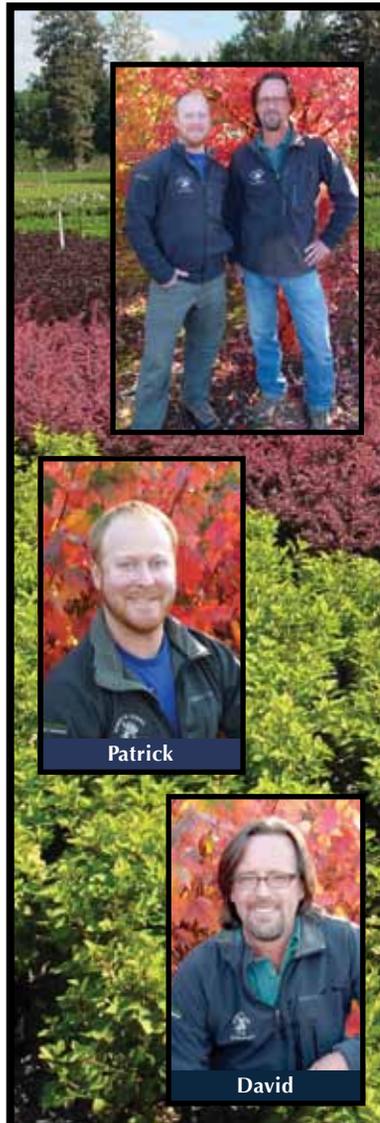
Until a year ago, Anderson Pots used only virgin plastic in its pots. Customers began demanding recycled material, so the company switched.

The company also has added biodegradable pots to its line. They break down when buried in the soil.

Although a new MAX light rail line soon will be constructed nearby, it won't force a move this time. A railroad siding will be relocated, but Anderson will still have access, and the ability to receive raw material shipments by rail.

"We're in business to stay in business," George said. "We will solve all problems."

Curt Kipp is the publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and the managing editor of Digger magazine. He can be reached at ckipp@oan.org.



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