



Tony Amberger, left, and brother Steve own Pinecrest Nursery & Landscaping, in business since 1954. THE ENQUIRER/CARA OWLSLEY

Nursery family knows the roots of success

Pinecrest in Sharonville in second generation

By Val Prevish
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When the late Herb Amberger started a roadside vegetable stand near his home in Sharonville on U.S. 42 nearly 60 years ago, he could not have foreseen that his fledgling venture would someday encompass hundreds of acres and include a full-service nursery and landscaping company.

Pinecrest Nursery & Landscaping, run by Amberger's two sons, Tony and Steve, is the result of Amberger's early enterprise, and with 14 employees and nearly 200 acres of plant production – the majority at the company's Wilmington farm – the business has come a long way from its early days of vegetable sales on the side of the road.

Offering hundreds of varieties of plants and trees, plus landscaping and hardscaping services, the business has doubled in size since Tony and Steve took over in 1999, says Tony, although he did not disclose sales figures. They have also expanded by buying nearby nurseries and property to enlarge their original retail space by more than a dozen acres, and adding a home and garden store selling everything from garden supplies to jewelry.

Even with the improvements, Tony says the nursery continues to use the original store built by his father in 1960, which is still the heart of the landscaping operation.

MAKING FAMILY BUSINESSES LAST

Tony Amberger says knowing how to use your strengths to make the most of the business and your relationships is key to keeping a family business strong through multiple generations.

For Pinecrest this has meant using Steve's creativity in hands-on landscape design, while Tony focuses on daily management of the company.

The house where his dad grew up next door is now their office.

"My dad really built this business by hand," says Tony, adding that his dad came to work every day until his death last year. "This was his passion. My brother and I inherited that passion."

Growing up working around the nursery, often helping load and unload trucks as they came in, Tony says he and his brother always planned to make it their livelihood eventually. Steve primarily oversees the landscaping today, while Tony manages the day-to-day operations.

"Even in high school I knew one day that I'd be in the business," he says.

The brothers say they have grown the company by adding services such as hardscaping – patios and outdoor fireplaces – now a large chunk of their landscaping business. During the busy spring, Pinecrest installs about four landscapes per

week on new and existing homes.

This year, Pinecrest will be a featured landscaper at Homearama in partnership with builder de Stefano Homes.

"The economy did slow things down. We used to do a lot of new homes, and that slowed down a lot. It is starting to pick up again," he says, noting that much of the company's business is in the northern suburbs such as West Chester and Mason.

Competition from big box retailers has hurt, too, he says. Although as a producer, he says his plant stock is fresher and healthier than the big box stores because it is grown locally, which customers frequently mention as a draw.

Judi Dyer of Mason, a long-time customer, says she keeps coming back because of the quality plants and the personal relationship with the Ambergers.

"We started with Herb, when he helped pick out a tree for Mother's Day for me years ago," she says. "Now it's Tony I see the most. They've always been able to answer my questions and they've had everything we needed."

As Tony's daughters, Lindsey, 12, and Lauren, 11, now work weekends in the garden store alongside his wife, Tina, and occasionally in the nursery, he sees a day when the third generation may take over.

"They are already interested in the business. I'd love to see them become a part of it." ■

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