

# Greenhouse can get greener, owner says

## He wants to overhaul landmark Pontiac nursery to include even more aggressive recycling.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

**PONTIAC** -- Aisles of healthy flowers, shrubs and tropical plants attest to a very green environment for Goldner Walsh Garden and Home Inc. Yet, the owner claims, without a \$1 million new investment, his 9 1/2 -acre property is less than eco-friendly.

"Greenhouses are actually one of the least green industries," said Tim Travis, owner of the nursery with \$2 million in annual sales. Utilities run \$95,000 a year, even with water hauled out of the river for use in summer months. Before the staff began aggressive recycling, its waste generated from jars, empty pots, plastic foam plates and spent water bottles filled a 40-yard trash bin every summer, not to mention the 200 cubic yards of cardboard.



Travis is rounding up investors to make a \$1 million overhaul of the site, which served as a cut flower warehouse and a nursery for 80 years before Goldner Walsh purchased it in 1980. The vision is to make the setting the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified greenhouse in Michigan.

"The more our customers see what we are doing and embrace it, the sooner we'll create a culture within the business," Travis said. He expects retail business to double in 2009 when the remodeling is complete.

Plans drawn up by Vincent Saroki Associates of Birmingham include a new garden store that wraps around the flower shop and existing garage. Travis plans to add a living roof above the gift store and the multipurpose rooms akin to the roof above the Ford Rouge Plant. He is building a biodiesel fuel generating station, a rain garden, a cistern for capturing water from condensation generated by rooftop air conditioners and a recycling plant open to the public.

"Tim's plan is very ambitious. We've tried to get people in touch with him so his dream will become a reality," said Midu Operoi, Pontiac's director of city planning. Beyond the energy efficiencies, Travis would like to have a green grocer, health food store and cooking school inside the greenhouses.

Preliminary steps include a recasting of stock. Travis ditched the cheap garden accessories he imported from China and began stocking Michigan artisans' products such as handmade soaps, fire pit bowls made from scrap propane tank and tiles from Pewabic and Motawi potteries. He sells the fertile soil he produces out of composted sod and chicken manure in burlap sacks.

A green movement is sweeping the region. The Building Association of Southeast Michigan hosts the second of five "green" classes this week to familiarize builders with materials and methods of achieving green certification. LaFontaine Automotive Group is erecting an all-green Buick-Pontiac-GMC-Cadillac dealership in Highland Township, scheduled to open in May. A green nursery is a natural.

"Goldner Walsh has a reputation for being the green doctors of Oakland County. They sell healthy plants and they maintain them for customers," said Ron Lipson of Orchard Lake. "Every time I come into the store I learn more about recycling and renewal. It's more than a purchase. You feel something exciting happening here."

*Maureen McDonald is a Metro Detroit freelance writer.*