

Greenhouse going greener

Goldner Walsh plans pioneering expansion to make it eco-friendly

By **JERRY WOLFFE** Of The Oakland Press

The owner of Goldner Walsh Garden and Home Inc. in Pontiac is going green in a big way with plans to spend \$2 million on an expansion project incorporating energy-efficient technologies.

Tim Travis, who bought the greenhouses and 9 1/2 acres on Orchard Lake Road in 1982, will spend \$2 million to make his greenhouses the first carbon-neutral Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified garden store in the country.

Travis is seeking up to \$2 million from investors or a governmental program to begin the extensive projects.

The late Al Goldner “started the first garden store at the (former) Hudson’s Department store in Detroit in the late 1940s,” Travis said.



Goldner Walsh Garden and Home owner Tim Travis shows a rendering of his proposed business expansion. The Oakland Press/JOSE JUAREZ

Goldner started his business in 1953 at Telegraph and 12 Mile roads in Southfield and moved to Pontiac in 1980. Travis worked summers there while earning a degree in horticulture and business at Michigan State University.

The site now has a garden store, a 40-foot-by-100-foot barn, a flower shop, 10 greenhouses and an outdoor plant display area, Travis said.

The building’s previous owner had rebuilt the flower shop in the 1920s and partially decorated it with Pewabic tile.

“Our product line is different from any other garden store or other retail greenhouse,” Travis said. “We have one of the largest collections of unusual tropical plants in Michigan.”

Travis also said he will retain the “architectural integrity” of the building when he does the expansion.

“We’re going to rebuild the whole garden store,” which is inside the greenhouse, he said. An event room also is to be doubled in size to 60 feet by 100 feet.

“It can host events and full-service catering,” he said. “The garden store

“I’m going to capture sun heat from the greenhouse, store it and use that for geothermal energy,”

Travis said. "It's two to three times more efficient than conventional geothermal."

Pipes inside the greenhouse will capture heat and carry it to a storage tank under the greenhouse. A heat pump will be used to extract heated water from the underground tanks and for a water heating system.

Glycerin, a byproduct of biodiesel, can be used to make soap.

"I'm working with a developer to create a small biomass furnace," he said. "We will be able to use glycerin, mix it with wood chips from my landscaping business and then use that as a supplemental heat source to be used in the biomass furnace inside the shell of our historic 1920 boiler."

Travis also plans to build a "living will become a small health-food type of market that ties in with a cooking school" he is planning.

He also wants to construct a biodiesel fuel-generating system to refine used cooking oil and replace diesel fuel in Goldner Walsh's trucks and equipment, Travis said. The company operates nine trucks and two Bobcat loaders.

"We use about 6,000 gallons of diesel a year," he said, noting cost savings could be significant. The used cooking oil will be picked up at local restaurants and hospitals.

"We can produce diesel for the trucks for about 70 cents a gallon," he said.

Other projects include a rain garden, a cistern for capturing rainwater and a recycling plant open to the public. The energy-efficient projects are designed to reduce the company's annual \$95,000 utility bill. roof" above the new garden entrance.

"We will plant plants that act as natural insulation and also reduce water runoff," he said.

The purpose of building green technologies is to "help educate (the public) and demonstrate the use of these technologies and make it visually available to the average person."

Goldner Walsh, which employs about 70 people during peak season, expects to recoup its expenditures on the expansion within 15 years, Travis said.

"The whole concept is creating a lifestyle experience as a retail experience but also creating a village of alternative technology that works together," Travis said.

Contact staff writer Jerry Wolffe at (248) 745-4612 or jerry.wolffe@oakpress.com.