

Family nursery grows in Auburn

Gwinnett business has changed over the past decade. Major companies employing hundreds of workers have moved to the county. But Gwinnett is also known for the success of its small businesses. So, every Sunday, the Post will profile the small businesses that have helped Gwinnett thrive. Interested in a business profile? E-mail Christy Smith at c15smith@yahoo.com

Bloomin' Designs Nursery

BY CHRISTY SMITH
Staff Correspondent



Special Photo

Linda Butler is the owner of Bloomin' Designs in Auburn.

nursery. She saw more nurseries needed to sell perennials, or plants that survive the winter and return every growing season.

Linda left the nursery after five years and opened a landscape installation business employing herself, her two children and a couple of hired hands. Mike kept his day job and took his two-week vacation at the height of the first year's planting season to dig in the dirt with his family.

"We evolved into our niche from there," Linda said. "When we first started, we thought putting in a 100-foot length of plants was a major step. The first three years it was just me, and I was trying to figure out how serious I wanted to get. In 2001, we expanded three-fold. That's when it really became a nursery."

This year, Bloomin' Designs will grow about 130,000 plants.

RISKS: "Trying to pick

plant varieties," Mike said. "One year we might sell 1,000 of a certain kind, so we double the growth for the next year and then they might not buy 50."

REWARDS: All members of the Butler family work in some aspect of the business. Son Jason, a college student studying finance, does most of the photography, and Mike maintains the Web site. Daughter Jennifer, a horticulture student at University of Georgia, creates gift baskets using annuals.

"It is a good learning experience for the children, and they have learned what it takes to open a business and maintain it," Linda said.

Mike is happiest that his family's land is being farmed once again.

"It had been farmed many years with one thing or another, cotton, hogs," Mike said. "Jason is the fifth generation since 1903 to live on and farm this land."

LOCATION: 558 Auburn Road in Auburn

WHAT THEY DO: Perennial grower supplies plants, flowers and 250 varieties of daylilies to wholesale and retail nurseries.

WEB SITE: www.bloomindesigns.com

PHONE: 678-376-7987

MAJOR PLAYERS: Mike and Linda Butler

EMPLOYEES: Two

FOUNDED: 1997

Mike and Linda Butler's gardening skills come from generations of family experience.

Mike's ancestors started farming Gwinnett County soil 1830. Linda's mother raised chrysanthemums for competitive shows, and both grandmothers supplied flowers for their Parkersburg, W. Va., church services.

After building a successful career in banking and finance, Linda returned to her roots 13 years ago when she began managing a plant