

# Nursery blossoms over 4 decades

**New ideas contribute to success**

by SCOTT NEWTON  
Staff writer

In 1946, J. Frank Schmidt Jr. started raising nursery stock on 10 acres of land at Northeast 192nd Avenue and Halsey Street.

In the 40 years since, the J. Frank Schmidt and Son Co. has grown to 1,810 acres and gross sales of about \$9 million a year.

Of that \$9 million, more than 95 percent is from out-of-state sales, according to Norbert Kinen, vice president and controller.

The company, which has three of its five farms in the Boring area, is a wholesale grower of deciduous shade and flowering trees.

Deciduous trees grow new leaves in the spring and become dormant in the fall.

In Oregon, the area west of the Cascade Mountain Range has a marine environment that contributes to rapid growth. Locally, the Columbia Gorge provides just enough winter — blasts of cold, "continental" weather — to harden the trees for the continental climates they will end up in.

The unique growing climate isn't the only thing that has contributed to the company's success, however. "We consider ourselves innovators," Kinen said. "It started with Frank Jr."

J. Frank Schmidt Jr., founder and president, was a leader in propagation techniques and also in the mass production of trees, said Kinen.

The best ideas are not always complicated. One of the Frank Schmidt Jr.'s innovations is called a "Grow-Straight." The two-sided, metal stakes keep newly propagated trees from growing crooked at the base. Left to their own, trees will grow in an "L" or "dog leg" following propagation.

Other nurseries now buy the patented stakes, and Kinen said garden shop owners are not interested in a tree with a crooked base.



Frank Schmidt III and his sister, Jan Schmidt Barkley, have always been involved in the family nursery business.

## Business part of Schmidt family

The Hood Acres Farm at 9500 S.E. 327th Ave. in Boring is a bustling place even in February, a time one would assume the agricultural industry was in hiatus.

The Hood Acres Farm — one of five farms — is the J. Frank Schmidt and Son Co. headquarters. It is there that a seven-person management team coordinates the growing, selling and shipping of

more than 50 species of deciduous shade and flowering trees.

The company was founded by J. Frank Schmidt Jr. 40 years ago. Frank Schmidt Jr., president, remains active in the management of the business, according to his son, J. Frank Schmidt III.

Frank Schmidt III, executive vice president, manages the production

side of the business.

His sister, Jan Schmidt Barkley, is officially listed as vice president. She describes her job as executive secretary to her father. Barkley was formerly manager of the seedling division at the High Forest Farm, 13355 S.E. Orient Drive.

When Kay Johnsen retired in January 1984 after 15 years with the

company, Barkley filled her position.

Barkley said she still misses working outside in nice weather.

J. Frank Schmidt and Son Co. is a family-owned business, and Barkley and Frank Schmidt III worked in a variety of jobs in the business while they were growing up.

greatly increasing the odds that they will sell.

The company is also among the developers of a variety of disease-resistant crab apple trees.

It is a fast-paced business, according to Kinen. Many of the varieties of trees available in the most recent catalog were not available 10 years ago.

**In this business, some trees won't be sold for six years, so planning is an important function**

In a business where some trees won't be sold until six years after the seed has been planted, planning is an important function. The company, which has seven salesmen in six territories across the northern two-thirds of the United States and in Canada, currently is taking orders for spring 1988.

The nursery business is tied to the construction industry, and regional economics can play a role in the moves the company makes.

"Interest is high in 1988 offerings, so we think the economy will be good for us another year," Kinen said.

What that means locally is jobs. The company ranges from a peak of about 300 jobs to a low of about 140 or 150 jobs when the season ends in late September.

J. Frank Schmidt and Son Co. is the largest grower of deciduous shade trees in Oregon, and possibly the United States. A nursery magazine ranks the company in the low 30s nationally in the nursery business, Kinen said.

The innovations go beyond metal stakes. The elder Schmidt was among the first to begin asexual propagation, a field in which Oregon was a leader in the nursery industry. He put buds with known qualities on root bases, mass pro-

ducing trees that bloom and withstand temperatures according to a genetic plan.

Asexual propagation offers a landscaper predictability.

The company pioneered a pruning technique it calls "customized

canopy." Adhesive tape is applied to the leader branch following two topplings. Taping promotes straight growth and contributes to symmetrical perfection.

The company also is innovative in its marketing. It grows its trees

to fit proportionately in five- and 10-gallon containers because that is often how garden centers display them.

In the spring, flowering trees are kept in cold storage until they are sent to retailers. Then they bloom,

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