

# Calendar

## Arm-Twisting Yields Tour

*Inside Encinitas Greenhouses*

**W**hat goes on behind greenhouse walls? Years back, when they were usually made of glass, they got whitewashed in hot weather. Now that most of them are translucent plastic, you still can't see inside them.

Evelyn Weidner, owner of Weidners' Gardens in Encinitas, knows the territory inside and out, so to speak. "I was born into the nursery business, and married into the greenhouse business. My father was a horticulturist. We lived in Three Rivers, a little mountain village in the San Joaquin Valley, on the way to

### LOCAL EVENTS

Sequoia National Park, and during the Depression, my father was lucky enough to get a government job raising the sequoia seedlings that the Civilian Conservation Corps planted."

During World War II, the family sold their land in Three Rivers and moved south, so Weidner's father could work for Kaiser Ship Building. After the war, they returned to the "momma-and-poppa" nursery business in North Long Beach. "By that time I was in junior high, and every day after school I went directly to the nursery to work and loved it. My husband-to-be had greenhouses in Buena Park. He was growing indoor foliage — ficus, *diffenbachia*, philodendron. I went out as a customer and ended up as a wife."

Twenty-seven years ago, the Weidners moved to their present location on Normandy Road. But the

wholesale-gardening business is "dying," says Weidner, a widow since 1988. Discount chains are one reason for its decline. The energy crisis is another. A third reason is the wholesalers' way of life. "What used to happen is that growers bought cheap land outside the city. Over the years, as the city spread and they got ready to retire, they sold their land to developers. And that still happens. But it's getting impossible for new growers to find reasonably priced land anywhere, and the business doesn't yield a great profit." As for herself, says Weidner, who is over 65 and not the retiring type, "I don't plan to sell. I just put \$300,000 into new greenhouses."

This weekend, the public is invited to look inside those new structures, which are not usually open to the public. Weidner and four other Encinitas wholesalers are giving behind-the-scenes tours as part of the Encinitas Flower Celebration.

At Browns' Plants, tour-goers will see how commercial indoor plants are grown. At the Paul Ecke Ranch, they'll preview new poinsettia colors, including purple. "They're an almost-burgundy," says Weidner, who isn't keen on them, likening the shade to that of "the cheapest plastic ones. But if you've got a Victorian house, it fits in." Dramm & Echter, sellers of cut flowers, which they grow hydroponically, will demonstrate their packing methods. Weidner herself wants to see how they "vacuum-suck the warm air out of the boxes and chill it quickly to 36 degrees." Ades & Gish has old-fashioned greenhouses, where 30 to 40 different



*Evelyn Weidner with begonias*

kinds of plants are grown, from rosemary to roses. "To make money, you grow only two or three kinds of plants," says Weidner, "and that's more like a factory. It's labor-saving, but it's not as much fun."

At Weidner's own greenhouses, she'll demonstrate her new intermittent watering system, designed to minimize run-off and waste, and the under-the-bench heating system. She'll also show "a whole house of pink antheriums," which she estimates to number 3000, as well as the object of her major passion, tuberous begonias.

"I first saw them at Antonelli's, on a trip to Santa Cruz with my parents when I was eight," she says. Established in 1935, Antonelli Brothers is known as the world's largest supplier of tuberous begonias. "I can still remember those big baskets hanging, and fell in love with them then."

The most unusual plants will be at Specimen House, where tropics from Hawaii and Florida are acclimatized. "We had to talk [owner] Bill [Kovach] into doing this," Weidner admits. "We did some major arm-twisting, because he has large palms [up to 14 feet], and so on, and his first comment was, 'I don't want those kids in there. They're gonna throw gravel. And [their parents] are gonna want to buy stuff.' So we said, 'We won't let any kids [in your place]. And it'll only be on Saturday for you. And you can sit in your office and be a grouch, and [others] can give the tour.'"

Some crotchety behavior is

expected of greenhouse keepers, whose mysterious profession demands devotion. Weidner is the opposite of crotchety, but she was, after all, at work on Memorial Day, when this conversation took place, recovering from a two-day Ladybug Festival. "Every kid got a free scoop of them. Oh, boy! Those bugs move fast when you're trying to get them out of the big jar and into a small plastic cup with lid. There were ladybugs all over the kids, the tables."

This weekend, once again, there will be free ladybugs at Weidners', as well as discounted plants being sold at the Open-Air Flower Market and at a couple of the greenhouses.

— Jeanne Schinto

**"Behind-the-Scenes Greenhouse Walking Tours" Encinitas Flower Celebration Saturday and Sunday, June 9 and 10 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Buses at three locations: Open-Air Flower Market, Leucadia Blvd. and Quail Gardens Dr.; Quail Botanical Gardens, 230 Quail Gardens Dr.; Encinitas Transportation Center, Vulcan Avenue, between D and E Streets \$15 adults; \$5 children under 12 Includes discount for admission to Quail Botanical Gardens Info and reservations (required): 760-753-6041 or 760-436-2194**



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