

Member Profile

The Growing Scene, Inc. Marengo

Landscape Design/Build —
Residential

by Meta Levin

It all started with a farm stand and a little girl who enjoyed helping her mother and grandfather. As Kathleen Carr grew up, talk about the family-owned business was kitchen table conversation. So, it was no surprise to those who knew her when, in 1996, she opened The Growing Scene, Inc. Armed with a Bachelors of science degree in agricultural sciences from Texas A&M University, she taught horticulture for three years at the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences and spent summers working in the nursery industry.

"I was destined to go out on my own," she says. The business began with a garden center, but she did a little landscaping from the first. Within three or four years, primarily as a result of customer requests, the business developed into a landscape company that has a garden center. Now the company offers a variety of services, including landscape maintenance, construction and design, installation of stonework and hardscapes, retaining walls and brick pavers, and has a perennial specialist on staff. The maintenance work is primarily pruning and seasonal cleanup.

Carr's mother Barb Christ, and grandfather Elmer Britton, own B&K Power Equipment, located on the same site as The Growing Scene. Oh yes, the farm stand is still there, offering sweet corn, tomatoes, green beans, peppers, muskmelons, pumpkins, apples, and straw bails.

From the beginning, Carr worked hard to market the company. She sent out press releases, advertised in local publications, and used direct mail pieces. Now, however, she gets most of her clients through referrals. Customers can browse at the garden center to see the variety and quality of plants available. "Each aspect of the company draws customers to the other," she says. "When I sell and go out on a job, I often will bring along a dozen ears of corn as a thank you gift. Customers love it."

The Growing Scene had two employees when Carr began. Now there are seven, all of them seasonal. Carr and her garden center manager, Erica Larsen, work together to do the design work. Larsen also does the estimating and plant ordering. She and Kate Borowicz handle all of the garden center merchandising and sales. Landscape foreman Jaime Cortez comes from a family with a rich history in the landscape industry. Carr

praises his knowledge and trustworthiness. His brother, Nic Cortez, is expert at building flagstone walkways and working around already-installed irrigation systems. All of this help allows Carr to focus on the customer satisfaction she believes is crucial to her business. "The bottom line is that when the job is done, the customer needs to be happy," she says. "We do what we need to do to make sure that our clients are thrilled."

These days her customers are asking for more low-maintenance plants, fewer evergreens and more flowering trees and shrubs. In addition, they want more decorative stone outcroppings. And, there is a newer trend toward burying downspouts.

An ILCA member since 2002, Carr was familiar with the association from her years working for nurseries. "It's an amazing organization," she says. "I appreciate the services that it provides."

She remembers attending ILCA events like Mid-Am, and says she would love to take advantage of some of the educational seminars. Between the demands of her business and those of her young family (Mary, 6, Sarah, 4, and Christopher, 3), that time is limited right now. She also hopes to have some time in the future to "give back" by volunteering with ILCA. Although her husband is not involved in the day-to-day activities of the business, she emphasizes that it "could not exist without his support." ❁