



Real Men Wear Purple



by Lora Keddle

As you drive through many of Oregon's most scenic towns, you can't help but notice the magnificent baskets of blooming flowers hanging from the light posts on Main Street. The flowers in these amazing baskets trail down six feet in a cascade of bright colors. Beach breezes blow the beautiful baskets into a gentle sway. Calm waters of local lakes reflect the beautiful baskets lining the streets. These elegant, enormous baskets of flowers can be found gracing light posts from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, thanks to one of our favorite Horties, Jack Bigej, also known as the Man in Purple.

Jack, the owner of Al's Garden Centers, has been on a mission to bring bold beautiful color to our homes, gardens and our communities since the 1960's. Al's Garden Centers were once named Al's Fruit Stand. Al Bigej, Jack's father sold fruit at the fruit stand starting in 1948. It isn't that Jack doesn't like fresh produce, but he fell in love with plants at the age of six when his grandmother taught him how to grow his first impatiens.

That love grew. When Jack was in his early twenties, he convinced his Dad to allow him to sell a few plants at the fruit stand. It was such a success that Al brought Jack on as a partner and changed the name to Al's Fruit and Shrub. You can say the rest is history.

Jack has an insatiable love for plants. He continually travels the world to find new plant material to bring back to his growing operations. His growing ambition has matured what was once a handful of greenhouses into a five facility growing operation that produces 99% of all the annuals, 95% of all the perennials and 50% of all the nursery stock that is sold at the three Al's Garden Center retail store locations.

Gardeners everywhere can thank Jack for continually supplying their addiction to plants. A few of Jack's plant contributions include Fragrant Delight Heliotrope, Angel's Trumpet, Dorothy's Delight Tomatoes, Solar Begonias and Black Jack Canna Lily.

How does Jack know what the next "must have" plant will be? He knows because he listens to customers. He is a hortie who knows that without people, his plants wouldn't have homes. Jack wants everyone to fall in love with gardening and to ask a few questions at their local garden center. At Al's Garden Centers, where the stores are filled with bright blooms, Jack realized that the staff would need to be seen to help people solve their plant questions. That's where the color purple comes in. Purple is an easy color to see, a color that stands out among the rest. That is why you'll find every Al's employee wearing a purple shirt. Even Jack wears Al's purple realizing that the bold, purple color stands out, making him more accessible. Standing out in a crowd, whether it's in the plant world or in his garden center is just what Jack likes to do.

Many gardeners in this community are thankful for this man in purple and his love of plants.

Garden Time airs weekly on:

Saturdays

KPTV-Portland at 8:30am

KEVU-Eugene at 8:30am

KWVT-Salem at 9:30am

CGN-Hood River/Columbia Gorge
at 9:30am

Sundays

KWVT-Salem at 7:00am

CGN-Hood River/Columbia Gorge
at 11:00am

KWVT-Salem at 1:30pm