



LUCI Awards

The Business Journal

May 1998

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By Jenny Diedrich

Susan Taliak Eyre – Rich's Foxwillow Pines Nursery, Woodstock

Susan Taliak Eyre says her role in the nursery she runs with her husband, Rich, is that of a "worker bee."

"This is Rich's vision and his dream," she said. "We're the worker bees who pull it off."

According to Rich, Eyre's business skills and knowledge of their products is critical to the success of Rich's Foxwillow Pines in Woodstock. The Eyres have created a unique niche with their business, which offers rare trees and dwarf conifers.

"Nobody gave us any encouragement to start a rare tree nursery," Susan said. "Through networking and talking about these trees every chance we got, we were able to influence horticulture in the whole Midwest region."

When the Eyres opened the nursery, Susan had a science background but no significant knowledge of species of trees. A high school biology teacher for 10 years, she was well on her way to becoming a school principal when she met Rich in 1980 in Albuquerque, N.M.

Rich, then a tree collector, was in New Mexico on vacation, and the two married and moved to Woodstock. They opened the nursery in 1988.

To help herself prepare for her role in the business, Susan took tree identification and bookkeeping courses at McHenry County College. She does a bit of everything at the nursery, including accounting, sales and taking care of trees.

Among her favorite parts of her work is dealing with her customers.

"It is so rewarding to work with gardening clientele," Eyre said. "They like to work with their hands and the soil and they want to create something beautiful. They're nurturing people."

Another reward comes from working outdoors.

"To have that connection to the Earth is what gives you balance in your life. I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives you to watch things grow," she said.

The Eyres consider educating gardeners an important part of their business. They give about 40 lectures a year to plant societies and garden clubs, and hosted the national meeting of the American Conifer Society last July.

Rich's Foxwillow Pines has been featured in *The Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Home and Garden Magazine*, *Chicagoland Gardening* and on a national television program, "Victory Garden."

"It took us probably the first five years to build a reputation. Now we've got people networking for us," Eyre said.

She and her husband also donate trees to local groups, including the Woodstock Opera House and Valley Hi Nursing Home.

"We got our livelihood from the city of Woodstock, and that's our gift back," she said.

Eyre said the dream that began, as her husband's has become a shared vision.

"It's bigger than we ever anticipated," she said. "It's exciting being on the horticulture forefront."