

Written Profile

Farm: Don Hahlbeck Greenhouse, Inc
Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Date of Origination: 1906
Industry Sector(s): Horticulture



“A family business like ours is wonderful, but it takes a lot of sacrifice,” shares Keith Hahlbeck of Don Hahlbeck Greenhouse, Inc. His honest reflection on the commitment required to operate an agricultural business in the same family for over 100 years reminds us of the determination embodied by American century farmers and ranchers. Join us as we explore their story of **Agriculture’s Lasting Heritage**.

In 1906 Wilhelm Hahlbeck, great grandfather to Keith, bought 80 acres of property in the town of Lake, Wisconsin. This area was later annexed into Milwaukee County in the late 1950’s. Wilhelm established a business built on hothouse tomatoes and vegetables. Greenhouses were added in 1923 and 1932 as the business grew. In the 1960’s the family decided to switch production to bedding plants and potted flowering plants such as pot mums, azaleas, Easter lilies, poinsettias, cyclamen, spring bulbs and spring annuals. The family continued to expand by building additional greenhouses in the 60’s and 70’s.

Today the family business resides on six acres of the original 80 acres purchased by Wilhelm Hahlbeck. “We have 60,000 square feet of greenhouse space and grow potted flowering and spring flowering annuals,” shares Keith. Four family members and three others serve as full time employees for the business. Keith and his wife Kathy, John Hahlbeck and their mother Eleanor Hahlbeck, own the family business.

The biggest challenge faced by the family came in the early 1960’s, when Donald Hahlbeck stopped growing tomatoes and vegetables. Transportation methods had changed and the tomato industry was no longer profitable for the family. He changed to spring annuals and potted flowering plants in a proactive step that kept the business in operation. “Being in the horticulture industry, we have had to adapt to the changing consumer market and also have to try to figure out what the economy will be like six to eight months ahead of each holiday,” shares Keith.

Involvement in Farm Bureau has been a helpful relationship for the Hahlbecks. Donald Hahlbeck was on the Farm Bureau board of directors for Milwaukee County for many years, and the family hosted several annual picnics at their greenhouses. According to Keith, it is helpful to be connected to, “other members in the Milwaukee area going through similar changes to their businesses.”

Reflecting on the longevity of their family business, Keith sums up his thoughts poignantly. “We would not be where we are today without the following things: faith in Christ and our family, and wonderful employees over the years.” We applaud the dedication of the Hahlbecks and those who have worked in the family business over the years, as we celebrate their contribution to **Agriculture’s Lasting Heritage**.