



**Plant Marketing completed its expansion project the first week of January despite snow and sub-zero temperatures in Eau Clair, Wisc. Pictured upon completion, from left, are son Josh Reit, daughters Angie Willier and Brenda Polden, wife Jennifer Reit and greenhouse owner Larry Reit. Larry's wife and daughters run the operation's two garden centers while Josh serves the greenhouse operation as general manager.**

# Expedited Expansion

Despite rain, snow and sub-zero temperatures in Northern Wisconsin, Plant Marketing L.L.C. completed a major expansion in a remarkable three-month period.

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**L**ARRY Reit's advice for other growers looking to expand their operations is simple. "Get started as early as you can," he says.

If you can't, follow Reit's lead for expedited expansion. Reit, the owner of Plant Marketing L.L.C., embarked on a 226,800-square foot expansion project in Eau Clair, Wisc., with Nexus Corporation late last year. Reit bought land in September, broke ground on the project in mid-October and completed it the first week of January

despite poor weather and a holiday schedule that pulled half the building crew away for two weeks.

Teamwork kept the project on track, as did Reit's will to complete the project on time. Reit even participated in the construction project himself.

"He was so hands on, in fact, that one Sunday, he was 14 feet in the air on a forklift helping lift trusses into place," says Al Sray, the Midwest sales manager for Nexus who served Plant Marketing on the project. "You don't see many owners working construction on a Sunday or precariously hanging off the end of the forklift to get a 100-pound truss into place."

Normally, Sray says, the biggest

construction responsibilities belong to his independent contract crew – not a greenhouse owner's crew. But because Reit had a foreman of his own who had experience building greenhouses, Reit's greenhouse crew was able to do just about everything Nexus contractors did.

"It meant the Nexus builder had to come into the project with an open mind and take advantage of the skills of Larry's crew – and not let egos get in the way," Sray says. "That is exactly why this project worked so well."

## The Need For Speed

But why build over winter? Why the rush? Plant Marketing had an immediate need because its garden center and

## Plant Marketing L.L.C.

**Recent Expansion:** Spanned 226,800 square feet in Eau Clair, Wisc., consisting of 18 Nexus Zephyr greenhouses measured at 30 feet wide by 420 feet long

**Main Crops:** Potted foliage, ornamental bedding plants

**Market:** Home improvement chains, supermarket chains, independent garden centers, wholesale florists/brokers

**Website:** [www.PlantOrders.com](http://www.PlantOrders.com)

es up before we had a conversation about how things were going," Sray says. "I said, 'Listen guys, we're going to make this a true crew.' They kind of split up, and we made mini crews. That really worked well after we got going. It helped me keep my costs down because we weren't paying more independent people to be here."

At Thanksgiving, Reit says Nexus took a week off and gave his crew assignments to keep the project moving. His crew didn't miss a beat then, nor

they FedExed them out to us."

Sray was equally impressed with Reit's determination.

"This is a great example of a structure company, its builder and the customer and his crew working hand in hand in some very difficult conditions to get a huge project completed on a tight schedule," Sray says. "Construction is a very tricky thing. A lot can happen to throw it off schedule, but we worked through all the bumps and pushed through to completion.



wholesale customers were demanding more bedding plants and hanging baskets for spring. Reit had been growing those items in Mt. Dora, Fla., but the cost of shipping from Florida became too much the last couple years.

So, Reit found 36 acres of land near his existing greenhouses in Eau Clair and began clearing it last September to prepare the site for construction.

"It was kind of a rush to get the design layout and the permits," Reit says. "Everybody seemed to work together very well, even the government officials and the DNR (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources). Within two weeks, we had bulldozers out there scraping off topsoil and starting to remove dirt."

With winter looming, the Nexus crew arrived in October and took the lead on construction. Reit's crew, meanwhile, leveled the ground, picked up rock and laid out steel for the Nexus crew. Naturally, there was animosity between the crews.

"I suppose we had four or five hous-

did it at Christmas, when Nexus put the project in the greenhouse crew's hands for two weeks. By then, the greenhouse crew was putting on the finishing touches.

Ultimately, Reit missed his initial finish date by a couple weeks, but heating, electrical and plumbing were all installed in time to start Plant Marketing's spring crops. Mission accomplished.

"There were times when I kept telling the crews, 'We are going to get this thing done one way or another – even if we have to throw more people at it,'" Reit says. "We moved in on time, and it's very rewarding."

The expansion project was the largest Plant Marketing ever took up, trumping a previous 100,000-square foot project that stood as the largest expansion in the operation's history. If Reit has to expand again, he says he'll stick with Nexus.

"I was really happy with them," Reit says. "They told us they were going to have X amount of semis on X date, and they did. They stayed with their commitment. If we had a shortage of parts,

Still, the next time Reit embarks on an expansion project, he'll do his best to avoid the bitter-cold rain, snow and sub-zero temperatures of Northern Wisconsin. Sray suggests other growers do the same.

"If growers have any choice in the matter, projects in Northern climates should not be done in the winter. It takes more time, and thus costs more money. There are many examples of little tasks that normally take a few minutes in good weather.

"That being said, this is why this project is so impressive. It exemplifies how vital it is the structures company, builder and owner work hand in hand to set a realistic schedule with pre-determined benchmarks – and then move heaven and earth to meet those benchmarks." **GG**

### More Online

To view a slideshow of Plant Marketing's project from start to finish, go to [www.GreenhouseGrower.com](http://www.GreenhouseGrower.com).

