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Careers | Elizabeth M. Fowler

Wanted: Experts in Gardening

HORTICULTURE, the care of trees, grass and gardens, is one service industry that is doing well, thanks, perhaps, to the yuppies, or young urban professionals.

"My phone has been ringing off the hook with job offers for our students," said Dr. David J. Beattie, professor of ornamental horticulture at Penn State University. "A letter came today from a big nursery outside of Washington with 15 job offers. This morning Dennis Burd of the Country Market in Mechanicsburg, Pa., called to say he has three management positions open."

Snipes Farm and Nursery of Morrisville, Pa., advertised in a trade magazine for an assistant greenhouse manager, assistant manager of retail nursery operations, garden center manager and a landscape designer who would also act as a nursery salesman, according to Dr. Beattie. In Pennsylvania, employment at retail nurseries and garden stores is up 10 percent in the last year.

"It is part of the yuppie image, having a beautiful garden along with an expensive car and a swimming pool," Dr. Beattie said.

He has another explanation for the keen interest in horticulture, especially landscaping: "Europeans have been ahead of us in wanting beautiful gardens," he said. Now he sees what he calls a maturation of American society — a growing interest in beautifying lawns. In fact, Dr. Beattie thinks nurseries might be one of the fastest-growing service industries.

He points out that many companies have moved to park-like suburban settings, where landscape maintenance is needed. In addition, many of their employees live in condominiums, which also require gardening.

"We even have companies from California recruiting here, such as Environmental Care, outside of Los Angeles," Dr. Beattie said.

At Penn State there are about 125 undergraduate majors in horticulture working for bachelor's degrees compared with 400 in 1983, according to Dr. Beattie. He said the decline in interest perhaps reflected that many horticulture majors considered the field more an avocation and took higher-paying jobs elsewhere.

At Purdue University Dr. Bruno C. Moser, a professor and head of the horticulture department, agreed, adding: "Two things are creating excess job opportunities. The service industry has been growing rapidly, and at the same time enrollment in horticulture has been in a declining trend nationally. I think association in students' minds with agriculture and the poor farm economy is a reason because most horticulture courses are in schools of agriculture."

In any case, the current crop of Penn State graduates is much too



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small to meet the demand for beginning horticulturists at salaries of \$18,000 to \$20,000 a year, and the same is true at Purdue.

Dr. Moser said, "Our good students with experience also can expect \$18,000 or \$20,000, but others only \$16,000 to \$18,000 to start." Most hope for their own businesses eventually because "they cannot expect much salary progress in small, privately owned family companies."

"There are more opportunities for entrepreneurs in this field than in many others," Dr. Beattie said, explaining that horticulture covers several specialties. Ornamental horticulture, Dr. Beattie's specialty, deals with nursery crops such as woody and herbaceous landscape plants. Other specialties include flowers and vegetables.

Both Dr. Beattie and Dr. Moser agree that horticulture might be a good career change for people who have lost middle-management jobs.

Besides a bachelor's program for horticulturists Penn State, as do other universities, offers a short program for career changers — a two-year technical program for nursery management — which has about 40 students studying for a certificate, many of them middle-aged.

"There was the driver of an oil rig, aged 42, who lost his job and took our program," Dr. Beattie said. "He now works for a small nursery. Our oldest student was a 62-year-old woman who works for herself in California."

"That is true in the Midwest, too. Dr. Moser said. "We are also picking up adults. He spoke of a medical doctor who took courses and then started a nursery, and an optometrist now working for a degree in horticulture with plans to open a business. He called it "one of the few areas in agriculture you can enter without a huge capital investment."

"So we give students many business courses along with horticulture — business law, accounting, salesmanship, small-business management, some economics, which is almost a double major," Dr. Moser said.

Drop in Working Rigs

HOUSTON, Feb. 2 (AP) — The number of working oil and gas rigs in the United States dropped last week, to 826, according to the Tool Company's rig count. Last year, the number was 1,594.

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