

## Something New Is Growing at Pinchbeck's

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**By Jen Matteis, Courier Assistant Editor:**

With the closing of Fonicello's Home & Garden Center in early 2007 and the closing of Pinchbeck's Rose Farm last year, times have been tough for local growers.

However, things are looking up again for Pinchbeck's, a family business first opened by current owner Tom Pinchbeck's great-grandfather in 1929. The farm opened its doors again last week with a greater goal in mind—Pinchbeck's will provide not just roses, but vocational training and employment for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. The new Growing Possibilities program is a collaborative effort of Pinchbeck's Rose Farm and the Connecticut organizations Ability Beyond Disability and the Autism Spectrum Resource Center.

The idea for Growing Possibilities was sparked by Jim Lyman—the owner of Lyman Orchards in Middlefield, a father of a child with an autism spectrum disorder and a friend of Pinchbeck's. The two met for lunch to discuss Lyman's concerns about his son Eli finding work after he turns 21—the same problem faced by countless families throughout Connecticut when their autistic children outgrow the state support system.

Under the leadership of Growing Possibilities Program Director Bob Graham and Ability Beyond Disability President & Chief Executive Officer Tom Fanning, Growing Possibilities will address this need by creating vocational opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum—starting at Pinchbeck's Rose Farm. The goal is to eventually employ as many as 25 individuals with autism spectrum disorders at the farm, as well as create an example for other businesses to do the same.

"It's a benefit to the farming community and it's a benefit to people with autism who are looking for work," said Fanning on opening day last Thursday. "It's such a perfect combination of a shortage of workers on the one hand and an availability of workers on the other hand who haven't been given a chance—it's a marriage made in heaven.

"We hope that it will be the first of several such ventures," Fanning continued.

The new initiative will hopefully help rejuvenate Pinchbeck's business, which was forced to close last October.

"Competition from overseas is the biggest issue," Pinchbeck commented. "It got too difficult to stay in business and make ends meet."

Pinchbeck's roses differ from those that have survived a trek from Columbia and Ecuador—the two countries where most store-bought roses originate.

“It’s really almost a different product,” Pinchbeck explained. “I would compare it to say a tomato that’s grown green and shipped in the wintertime as opposed to something that’s vine-ripened.

“There’s so much more flavor in the vine-ripened tomato,” he continued. “It’s the same with roses. You smell it, you watch it, you devour it in other ways.”

With a total of approximately 150,000 square feet of greenhouse space—one which is listed with Guinness World Records for its size of almost 100,000 square feet—the family is back in business.

“This is exciting on a lot of different levels,” said Pinchbeck. “With the local farm movement becoming much stronger in the last year or two, it seems there’s an opportunity to make this work.”

Pinchbeck’s Rose Farm is located at 929 Boston Post Road in Guilford. For more info, contact Kim Bragoli at 203-826-3185 or visit [www.growingpossibilities.org](http://www.growingpossibilities.org) or [www.abilitybeyonddisability.org](http://www.abilitybeyonddisability.org).