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News

## Rose farm with mission plans open house

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By Pamela McLoughlin, Register Staff

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When Pinchbeck's Rose Farm holds its open house Dec. 13, the new management is hoping to draw the obvious audience of florists, restaurants, wedding planners and others in the business of buying flowers.

But they also hope to attract what might at first seem like an unlikely bunch: educators and parents, especially those whose children are autistic.

The 80-year-old farm in Guilford got a new face last summer when Jim Lyman bought it, and now the staff is as remarkable as the roses.

Most of the workers are on the autism spectrum and are doing everything from caring for the flowers to making deliveries, answering telephones and working the computer.

Retail Operations Manager Lori Gregan, a florist, said she's always embraced opportunities to work alongside people with special needs, and now having the opportunity to employ them is even better. She hopes the work at Pinchbeck's will be a stepping stone.

Autism is a developmental disorder affecting a person's ability to communicate and read social cues, and in many cases, limits cognitive function. Affected people are said to be on a spectrum because the degree of symptoms varies.

"You have to find the strength of each person; each person brings something to the table," Gregan said of how she makes assignments. "They bring us strength because as we sell more roses, we have more jobs."

Gregan and other typical workers at the farm have had training with and have ongoing access to experts from the Connecticut Autism Spectrum Resource Center.

The rose farm is part of a vocational program called, "Growing Possibilities," which is working to add other vocational training and job opportunities, said Julie Hipp, managing director for the program. Currently, the program falls under the auspices of Ability Beyond Disability, but is in the process of getting its own nonprofit designation.

"We want people to think of us as a center of excellence for employing people on the (autism) spectrum," Hipp said.

The Dec. 13 Roses for Autism open house, which will include tours of the greenhouse, is from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the farm, 929 Boston Post Road.

"We want people to come and see how beautiful our roses are," Hipp said, adding that it's also a chance for parents and

educators to “understand what we offer,” and the future possibilities.

Hipp said that while Growing Possibilities does not plan to limit its future endeavors to agriculture, it is generally a good place because it is a relatively low-key environment that won't overload the senses. Sensory overload is often a problem for those on the spectrum.

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