

Perennial recognition

Local growers take awards

By Julie Lane

Those who live on the North Fork aren't surprised that this is a mecca for plant growers. But the reality was brought home this month when the Perennial Plant Association (PPA) focused attention on local growers during its weeklong symposium at the Grand Hyatt hotel in New York City.

For June Croon of The Plantage in Cutchogue, it was a tribute to her success in taking the helm after her sister and Plantage founder, Lois Woodhull, succumbed to cancer in 1997.

'...I couldn't walk away from it.'

—June Croon, on continuing her sister's business

“I didn't have any preparation for it,” she said about taking over the business. When she first returned to the area in 1996 from Florida after Ms. Woodhull became ill, the future of the business was something the sisters just couldn't discuss, she said. But about a week before Ms. Woodhull died, Ms. Croon said, “I could tell this was such a burden on her heart. She had built her life around the love of plants.” To lift the burden, she promised her sister she would keep the business going.

“It was like a little orphan and I couldn't walk away from it,” she said. But “Lois set the bar high” and Ms. Croon had a lot to learn from her sister's associates, she said. She credits



Suffolk Times photo by Judy Ahrens

Anne Trimble (left) and Nancy Leskody at Trimble's of Corchaug on Monday.

Plantage manager Diane Juergens, who had worked closely with Ms. Woodhull, with teaching her the ropes.

This month, the PPA honored The Plantage and Ms. Croon as Grower of the Year.

“It was a tremendous honor,” said Ms. Croon. She sees the award as a tribute to her late sister, who, she said, advanced the industry, and to the “tremendous” staff members who have continued to work at The Plantage.

To honor her sister and at the request of Blooms of Bressingham, The Plantage developed the coreopsis “Crème Brulee.” The original plan was to name the plant for Ms. Woodhull. But when it came time for naming, Ms. Croon said she got cold feet and thought her sister might not like the idea. Hence, the Crème Brulee name. But now The Plantage has introduced to the North Fork a plant originally from South Africa, and Ms. Croon has taken the leap and

named the local offshoot *Plectranthus Lois Woodhull*.

Ms. Croon's success wasn't the sole glory for North Fork growers. Nancy Leskody, who runs Trimble's of Corchaug with her partner, Anne Trimble, was selected to run a two-day nursery and garden tour on the North Fork and in Connecticut. Besides stops at Trimble's and The Plantage, the North Fork tour included visits to

Perennial...

► From page 14

Ivy Acres and Peconic River Herb Farm in Calverton, H.R. Talmage & Son Nursery and the Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center in Riverhead, Beds and Borders in Laurel and The Garden at Landcraft Environments in Mattituck.

About 60 growers from around the country joined Ms. Leskody's tour to learn more about how nurseries func-

tion here and to gather ideas they can use in their own businesses, she said.

There's no “cookie cutter” type of model because “plants are live,” said Ms. Leskody. But the tours provide an understanding of how new plants are developed and also give participants information about marketing and other aspects of running the business, she said.

Landcraft Environments owners Dennis Schrader and Bill Smith have “one of the best gardens,” said Ms. Leskody. More than 60% of their

operation is dedicated to tropical plants grown as annuals, going indoors in winter as houseplants.

Tour participants showed a lot of interest in trial gardens being grown at the horticultural research center, said Ms. Leskody.

“And it was a real honor to bring people to Trimble's,” she said. That's a stop that was added to the tour at the last minute when time allowed for its inclusion.

The symposiums help feed the need to continue learning, said Ms. Trimble. “You have to have a will to learn” if you're going to be successful, she said.