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Watch and learn

I always like to begin this column the same way, by acknowledging that while it can be challenging to pull myself away from my day-to-day nursery operations, every time I visit another nursery, I come back with new ideas and fresh energy. I'd like to dedicate this column to sharing some of those ideas and introduce you to the people who inspired them.

This trip takes me just around the corner to **Sevenoaks Native Nursery LLC**. It's less than a mile from my nursery as the crow flies. I'm greeted by co-owner Scott Anderson, who in turn introduces me to Rene Riano Sanchez, who I've come to meet. Rene has been with Sevenoaks for 20 years, working his way up to crew leader. He is a warm person who immediately strikes you as a capable and humble leader.

Rene is eager to show me one of the improvements that he is currently working on. He points to a square digger flat, filled neatly with sawdust and holding several rows of freshly stuck *Ribes sanguineum* — or red flowering currant, to the uninitiated bedding plant growers like myself.

Several years ago, Sevenoaks was seeing demand from their customers carry into the summer, just when they were running out of the potted gallon material that began as bare-root plants months before. It was around that time that Rene was working in another area of the nursery, and noticed some red flowering currant rooting out from the wood into some sawdust they were temporarily healed over in.

Rene tells me you just need to "Pay attention," and you'll be surprised by the opportunities that present themselves.

He immediately took some cuttings and filled a few 72-cell plug trays, tucking them away in a greenhouse. That year they rooted out successfully, allowing his



Ben Verhoeven meets with Rene Riano Sanchez at Sevenoaks Native Nursery. He says you just need to "Pay attention," and you'll be surprised by the opportunities that present themselves. PHOTO BY SCOTT ANDERSON

team to plant a few more gallons for the late-season demand.

Not satisfied with stopping there, Rene experimented with sawdust diggers and some rooting hormone he picked up at the Farwest Show. Fast forward two years, and he and his team have tripled their successful cutting production of red flowering currant.

Unlike the bare-root production, these cuttings are a very dense crop until the moment they are needed. This allows Sevenoaks to prepare for summer demand without using too much of their valuable space.

It's a good reminder that space matters and customer demand matters, but you cannot utilize space or respond to customer demand without folks like Rene. He took the time to observe, he started with a small trial, he saw further room for improvement, and he seized the opportunity.

Rene leaves me with this thought: "Discover something. Try it out." Words to live by.