

{ Member Profile }

## A Unique Growth Plan

Interior Plants develops deep customer roots



**L**ike many business owners, Alan Brody deals with a variety of logistical, financial, and operational challenges. But some of his situations – like determining how to transport a 20-foot-tall, 1,000-pound Ficus tree – are a bit out of the ordinary.

It's all in a day's work for Brody, founder and owner of Interior Plants, a Hamilton Square-based, plant-focused interior design, or "plantscape" company. The growing firm adds soothing greenery to office, commercial, and residential spaces in the New Jersey and Pennsylvania markets.

Brody provides and cares for plants on regularly scheduled visits. "Under our care, if a plant doesn't look healthy, we will replace the plant with no additional cost to

the client. They're looking for solutions and that's what we provide."

With a diverse customer list – including two Hamilton-based institutions: Seward Johnson Atelier and Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital; Quakerbridge Mall in Lawrenceville; East Windsor-based Elementis Specialties, an international supplier of specialty chemical additives; and Parx Casino in Bensalem, Pa. – Brody must be doing something right.

Brody started Interior Plants as a part-time venture in the early 1990s, when he was working for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in Philadelphia. "It all started when I was at a Chinese restaurant and noticed that the plants in the establishment were not in good

shape," he says. "On a whim, I proposed a business deal to take care of them, and that's how I got started. I kept getting new clients, mainly from word-of-mouth referrals, and about 15 years ago, the enterprise kept me so busy that I left HUD and went into Interior Plants full time."

The company continues to enjoy a positive growth curve. "We have a lot of repeat business from satisfied customers, and we get a lot of new business from referrals," he says. "I also do a lot of networking, often through the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce, the Princeton Chamber of Commerce, and LeTip of Princeton."

Brody relishes any challenge when it comes to combining plants to achieve optimum results for a client.

"The first thing I do is try to understand a client, and see what makes him or her comfortable," says Brody. "But you also have to consider the physical, psychological, and other characteristics of each client, and I'm not bashful about pointing out alternatives to them." A dentist once told Brody that he loved cactus plants and was determined to have some in his office. "But I pointed out that many people already associate a dentist appointment with some discomfort, and a thorny cactus would only reinforce that negative feeling," Brody says. "He agreed, and we went with a more soothing and relaxing selection."

Brody would like to offer additional services, too. "One initiative is a so-called 'green wall,'" he says, referring to walls that incorporate horizontally hung planters over small or large spaces. "We're also discussing large-plot terrariums for lobbies and other indoor spaces, and 'green roofs' on top of buildings. There are plenty of growth opportunities in this segment, and we're looking forward to fulfilling customers' needs." ❖