

Hydra-Point Plant Growers, Watsonville startup, grows to 25 employees

By Jondi Gumz , Santa Cruz Sentinel

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Tony Barcelo, seen at Hydra-Point Plant Growers with his son Tony Jr. on Friday, and his wholesale flower-growing operation in Watsonville received a six-figure loan from Cal Coastal Rural Development Corp. to launch the business. He has 25 full-time employees. (Kevin Johnson -- Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Where: 195 Paulsen Road, Watsonville.

Owner: Tony Barcelo

Employees: 25

Information: 831-970-3034

WATSONVILLE >> Tony Barcelo is feeling good about the flower business again, growing his own wholesale venture with help from the Small Business Development Center at Cabrillo College as the economy improves.

He has 25 full-time employees at Hydra-Point Plant Growers at 195 Paulsen Road, after starting with 18 when he opened in August 2013.

Hydra-Point specializes in hydrangeas and poinsettias, palm trees, ground cover and assorted shrubs.

Drought-tolerant succulents are a new addition to appeal to water-conscious gardeners.

A grower with 28 years' experience, Barcelo learned from his father, working at the family owned Barcelo Enterprises in Salinas.

The housing crash of 2008 hit hard. Homeowners lost their homes and stopped buying plants at Target, Home Depot and Lowes.

Irvine-based Bordier's, one of the nation's 25 largest nurseries, filed for bankruptcy protection as did Hines, a competing firm based in Irvine.

Hines acquired Bordier's and then was acquired by Black Diamond Capital Management, a hedge fund in Connecticut that downsized the operation.

El Modeno Gardens, a nursery with a 91-acre operation at 195 Paulsen Road, went under.

In the dark days of 2010, Barcelo told GreenhouseGrower.com, "I think the industry is lost now."

Today, his outlook is much brighter, having built a successful relationship with Costco, the second largest retailer in the U.S., for what he grows.

He credits Danny Braga, an adviser with the Small Business Development Center, for helping him put together a package that got him a six-figure term note and line of credit from Cal Coastal Rural Development Corp. in Salinas.

Barcelo now grows for Color Spot, which in 2012 bought the three remaining Hines' facilities, two in California, one in Oregon.

He also grows for Kawahara Nurseries in Morgan Hill and Altman Plants in Salinas.

The opportunity has proved attractive to the next generation in this plant-growing family.

"My son graduated from the University of Arizona and came to work for me," Barcelo said.

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