

Selling Yourself

Visitors from across the pond, down under, and beyond brought many great ideas to help you stand out in a crowd.

By Mary Greendale

In the past eight months, visitors from England and Australia came to Massachusetts and left behind enough ideas and innovations to keep MNLA members busy for quite a while. Here's hoping you read something here that you can use.

The Four Brits

Last summer, four Brits from Coolings Nurseries in Kent, England attended MNLA's 2010 Great Ideas Summer Conference and spent the rest of the week visiting some of our premier regional stores. They came to learn about retailing American style. According to Neville Stein, Coolings' marketing consultant and trip planner, they chose Massachusetts because, "The state is home to some of the USA's finest retailers such as Louis Boston – voted one of the top 25 retailers in the USA. Notable retailers on our itinerary included Jordan's Furniture Store, Whole Foods Market, LL Bean, The Party Warehouse, and outdoor goods retailer, Bass Pro." They also visited Wilson Farm in Lexington and Bemis Farms Nursery in Spencer.

Coolings was named The Best Gardening Centre in the UK by *Which? Gardening* magazine. They grow most of their own plants, operate two restaurants featuring their own crops, offer workshops and horticulture certifications, entertain with Mad Hatter Tea Parties, and present special events like a car show or pond dipping and bug hunts! Check out their fabulous website, <http://www.coolings.co.uk/index.php>. And for those who need some encouragement to utilize the web aggressively, it's a great site to tour for ideas and inspiration.

Then check out their new Coolings Green & Pleasant, their outdoor inspiration site at http://www.coolings.co.uk/index.php?option=com_magazine&func=show_edition&id=5&Itemid=70. Here they carry furniture, hard landscape materials, everything aquatic (indoors and out), hold a regular Farmers' Market, and have a garden buildings showroom. There's a nature trail with sheep, too! The U.S. trip was to investigate new ideas for Green & Pleasant in particular.

The biggest take-home lesson for Stein was, "Be proud of our heritage and history and shout about it to the customers, with story boards, signage etc. Biggest lesson for Coolings - improve the quality of visual merchandising, create more WOW factors in the displays, have fun with signs and displays."

All garden center photos by John Stanley.

