

Nursery digging up its roots

Maplewood Gardens Nursery is being forced to give up two-thirds of its land.

By Mark R. Fletcher
News-Leader

Changes sweeping over 47-year-old Don Fesperman are forever altering his decades-old family business, and forcing him to part with his favorite pets.

Fesperman, owner of Maplewood Gardens Nursery, is auctioning much of his equipment and inventory — trees, shrubs, greenhouses — Saturday to squeeze his business into one-third of its current size. The new owner of the property on which the nursery sits, developer/contractor Sara Ray, wants him off the other two-thirds by July 7.

Ray said she plans to put a strip mall on the vacated land, leaving the other third for Fesperman, who hopes to buy it. Fesperman had rented the property.

Fesperman's portion includes the office and blue house at 1622 E. Republic Road, where he also lives.

But the fish pond — and his Koi — just outside his front porch must go.

"These are my fish, they're not things we sell," he said. "They're just a wonderful pond-fish. They're really domestic. They'll come up and eat from your hand."

"I come out here and sit on the porch and drink my coffee, and they line up along the edge of the pond and look at me like, 'Well, Dad, are you going to feed us now?'"

When Fesperman bought the nursery in the 1970s, "it was just me, jack rabbits and alfalfa," he said.

Today the south-Springfield property is among the most sought-after real estate around.

The nursery, originally called the High-M Nursery, has operated for about 40 years, including the 25 he's owned it, Fesperman said.

"We knew this was inevitable," Fesperman said. "This being good commercial property, we knew we'd



Don Fesperman, owner of Maplewood Gardens Nursery, helps Cheryl Myers pick out shrubs Thursday afternoon. Fesperman is being forced to sell off much of his inventory because he's losing two-thirds of his lot space to a new strip mall.

Christina Dicken
News-Leader



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Stacy Fesperman waters some of the plants at Maplewood Gardens Nursery. The nursery is auctioning off some inventory Saturday.

either get squeezed down or out."

Fesperman employs about seven people, and "a lot of family help," including his daughter Stacy.

The 21-year-old civil-engineering student worked at the nursery through high school and still helps out when she's not attending classes

at the University of Missouri-Rolla.

"As long as I can remember it's been like this," she said. "And it'll be a change, but we'll still be here — just a little bit smaller."

Cheryl Myers, a 35-year-old from Nixa, frequently shops at the nursery. She found out about the upcoming move on Thursday.

"I always buy things here because they're nice plants, and (nursery employees are) always helpful," Myers said. "I was surprised."

Fesperman isn't sure how much the change will hurt his business. "I'm sure it will a little bit," he said. "But we've been in business a long time; we just won't have as much room as we used to."

Fesperman doesn't plan to relocate, and is fairly confident his business will survive, but still has "some trepidation," he said.

"I have customers who've been with me since the get-go. If I have to move away, it'll be like moving away from family."