

### A Look Back: Recalling Short Course

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*In the very early days of GrowerTalks, there were mentions of about a dozen different “short courses,” including the Omaha Short Course, the Illini Florist’s School and the Purdue Short Course. “The remarkable transition of our ‘business’ toward the status of a modern ‘industry’ with all the necessary ramifications such as closely knit trade organizations, scientific production methods and legislation seems no better typified than in our Short Courses, dozens of which are conducted all over the country thruout [sic] the year,” wrote George J. Ball.*

*In the second issue—June 1937—the second annual Chicago Flower Growers Short Course was covered. It was held at the Ball headquarters in West Chicago, Illinois (which is still the company’s main HQ) with about 150 people in attendance. The Florists Exchange wrote this about the event:*



The Chicago growers are fortunate in having such an interesting and suitable place for their school. No other growing establishment in the Chicago area is more modern or more indicative of a progressive and aggressive operator. The Ball greenhouses never looked better and every house contained several things of special interest in the way of new species of plants, new varieties of common plants, or new cultural practices being tried or already in successful operation. The liberal amount of explanatory labels and the willingness of Mr. Ball and his capable sons explaining any details made the visit more profitable to all, in addition to the school itself.

*George lamented often about the importance of “getting together” at the numerous events and short courses. It was something he felt was vital to a successful business and was consistent with his mantra to share as much information with other growers as possible. He was certainly ahead of his time with much of his business ideology.*

*From December, 1938:* The idea of getting together and collecting small equitable sums for promoting our business is not new to the flower business. It is successfully working out today in a number of large centers. Why don’t we get together nationally and make one big effective job of it? ... Our industry is made up of innumerable small units, around 25,000 it is estimated. With such a number it is quite necessary if any effective work be done, that the principle and benefits of getting together be taken advantage of. Getting together is the key note of these economic times. We must take fuller advantage of it or suffer further over supplies and losses. You say it is impossible to get everybody together; that is so of every industry. There are and always will be those who will hang back. But I ask you, are we going to permit our business to stagnate because of the few who hold back? I don’t believe we will, and that sooner or later we will tell this “cockeyed world” that it needs to use more flowers; and it will believe us if we go about it right.

*The first reference I found about “The Ohio Short Course” was in February 1940. Vic Ball wrote that it was “certainly one of the most important of the annual round of short courses both in prominent tradespeople in attendance and up-to-date value of programs ...” Back then, it was also held in Columbus, but in January. (The timeframe switched to June in 1983 and then July in the early 90s.)*

*Even through World War II, the attendance was between 135 and 200 people. After Vic came home from serving on the front lines, he jumped right back into covering the industry for GrowerTalks. His first duty was to attend the Ohio Short Course. It certainly shows that the more things change, the more they stay the same—especially since a lot of people continue to take advantage of the hotel bars during Short Course.*



*In the February 1946 issue, Vic wrote:*

*Looking around for a good “first exposure” to flowers and growers during this long terminal leave from the Army, yours truly decided on the Ohio Florist’s Conference—at Columbus Jan. 7-10. So, with toothbrush and notebook in hand we checked in at the Neil House, where many a beer has gone down amidst other such sessions in the good old pre-war days.*

#### Topics from Short Course through the years, plus some attendance numbers:

**1941** (265 attendees) “Do You Know How to Water?”; the importance of aeration in soil; are azaleas replacing hydrangeas?

**1946** Germination of seed in sphagnum; automatic temperature control, watering and venting; gravel culture; plant bands; carnation diseases; and wilt-resistant asters

**1954** (400 attendees) “Small Pot Plants: Big Sales Volume?”; “Liquid Feeding: Cheaper & Better”; “Better Mums & Poms”; “Pot Mums: Two Approaches”

**1963** “Growth Retardant News: Phosphon D, Cycocel & B-995”; Professor Don Kiplinger on foliar analysis; Professor Bob Holley on CO2

**1969** (880 attendees; the highest to date at the time, but it was a rough year—many seminars were cancelled because a flu bug got the best of many speakers and the weather made traveling difficult. Vic wrote: “Is January the best time—really?”) Dr. Marc Cathey on “Floriculture in the 21st Century” (“... electronic data processing may well come into production and marketing of ornamentals.”); plastics for greenhouse covering (“... produces better growth than glass.”); production space costs (1 cent per square foot per day for bench space)

**1975** Dr. Ray Sheldrake from Cornell on soilless mixes; a Cleveland grower on how he makes money selling to the chains (mostly grocery stores); “Pointers on Growing Foliage”; “Florel: More Geranium Cuttings Per Stock Plant”; importing cut flowers

**1983** (2,100 attendees, first year it was in June instead of January) “Do Plugs Really Transplant Faster?”; computers; “Do Pelleted Begonias Work?”

**1997** (held in Cincinnati, not Columbus) Do seed enhancements justify added seed costs?; Which biological pest controls really work?; ideas for creative hanging baskets and window boxes; the latest research on A-Rest, Bonzi and Florel

**2005** Focus on the major trends: painted poinsettias; easy-carry consumer packaging; and open-roof greenhouses; the first Young Grower winner was also crowned that year—Andrew Britten of Costa Color **GT**