

Milpitas Camera Club Field Trip

Field Trip: **Goldsmith Seed Company**

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Drive a little, see a lot—Goldsmith Seed Company a patch of bright summer colors in Gilroy

Have you ever driven to Watsonville through Gilroy, via the Hecker Pass Road (152 West), and noticed a colorful patch of flowers partially hidden behind a roadside grove of trees? The vibrant patches of color are from the blossoms in the test plots owned by Goldsmith Seed Company of Gilroy. Every time I've driven by, I've asked myself the same question: I wonder if they



would let me stop to take a closer look at the flowers? The answer to this questions is: Yes! This 42-year-old, family-owned company is visitor friendly. According to company pamphlets, the company welcomes guests to come and look at its colorful palette of test flowers from a landscaped strolling garden, complete with observation deck, benches and restroom facilities. Tours of the labs and facilities can be arranged for groups by calling in advance.

After taking an early morning stroll on Sunday, July 31 with a group of fellow MCC members and associates, I discovered that Goldsmith's Gilroy operation is much larger than it looks from the road. The early morning light was ideal for capturing the colors and the mild temperatures made shooting very comfortable. You really don't need to go with a group to experience the abundant flowers at Goldsmith. The months of July, August and September offer the best selection of flowers.

Although the company makes you feel right at home, you are obligated to be a good guest and not pick any of the flowers or walk in the flower beds—that's just common sense



The company has quite an interesting background. Goldsmith is a multinational company specializing in developing new varieties of flowering plants. Goldsmith is a family-owned company, founded in 1962 by Glenn and Jane Goldsmith. Founder Glen Goldsmith graduated in 1950 from U.C. Davis with a bachelor's degree in plant genetics and did his graduate work at UCLA in ornamental horticulture. He went into the seed producing business in Central America before coming to Gilroy to establish

Goldsmith with his first crops of snap dragons, dianthus, petunias and geraniums. Over the years, the company has grown in leaps and bounds, adding plant breeders, technicians and greenhouse workers to a staff that now exceeds 4,000 persons. For 42 years, Goldsmith has built new laboratories, greenhouses, research stations and seed-production sites in order to maintain its status as a leading producer of ornamental flowers.

Some of the company's facilities include far-flung production sites in Guatemala and Kenya and a research station in the Netherlands. The company's literature proudly lays claim to the distinction of producing the "best flower" varieties in the world. Apparently that's a claim they have no problem backing up. Their varieties have won numerous awards in many prestigious shows, including 22 All American Selections awards and 14 Fleuroselect medals. Goldsmith geraniums have been planted on the grounds of Buckingham Palace in London. The variety of "Americana Red" geraniums were selected because, in addition to their horticultural performance requirements for England's climate, they precisely matched the color of red in the palace guardsmen's uniforms. Goldsmith also took part in the 2004 Chelsea Flower Show in London, England. The event is sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society and first began in 1912. Goldsmith's digitalis was featured at last year's show. Digitalis has a bell-shaped flower that blooms in groups on vertical spikes. On our own continent, for the past few years, Goldsmith flowers have been a part of the International Flower and Garden Festival, held at Epcot Center in Florida. Goldsmith put out more than 150,000 plants for a display called the Flower Fields at the 2003 festival.

Goldsmith's specialties now include geraniums, impatiens, cyclamen, petunias, dianthus and geraniums. The flower test plots are easily seen from the grounds of their Gilroy facility and the inner court of the main building features several flower beds around a lawn accented by a koi pond and small Japanese style bridge. There are various surprises hidden on the grounds including a sunflower plot way in the back and a good sized swimming pool on the grounds.



Next year I'd like to arrange a group tour of the company facilities, so keep your eyes open for an expanded Goldsmith offering on next year's field trip schedule.

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