

## Sweetwater Garden

By the late 1980's, Riverton had suffered a very soft housing market for several years. Many properties were on the market for so long that the unattended yards required renovation once new owners moved in. In spite of continuing poor local economic conditions, Riverton native Kim Wilbert and his partners viewed the situation as an opportunity to start a new nursery business. For Kim, a life long interest in plants and a desire to work for himself made the risk well worthwhile. Utilizing Small Business Administration (SBA) guidelines to create a business plan and after the ensuing market analysis indicated that another nursery in Riverton could be successful, Kim and his partners decided to start Sweetwater Garden.

A run-down nursery property was for sale on the west edge of Riverton and the fledgling company purchased the property on a contract-for-deed agreement. While this arrangement facilitated the property exchange, it did not allow the new business to build equity in the property. Property improvements, inventory expansion, and equipment purchases were very difficult because lenders could not view the property as Sweetwater Garden collateral. However, the market analysis and the business plan were correct in the sense that the business grew very quickly.

After three years, the partnership dissolved and Kim was able to get a long-term SBA 7(a) guaranteed loan through a local bank that allowed Kim to pay off the contract-for-deed and purchase adjacent property. A few years later, with a second SBA loan, Kim and his wife, Wendy, were able to construct a new greenhouse.



Kim, Wendy, their niece Holly, and a great staff, built the business into the wonderful place it is today. Over time all the facilities were replaced with new structures and more property was added. They worked hard to present a nice product to their clientele. "Unlike a grocery store, people shop here because they love to visit our store, not because they have to shop here." said Holly.



Sweetwater supports urban forestry projects in the surrounding communities by working with local tree boards in Riverton, Lander, Shoshoni and Dubois. Kim and his crew have donated labor and equipment to assist with numerous planting projects. Kim worked with the volunteer Riverton Downtown Project to help create the new highway enhancements in downtown Riverton, and volunteered landscape designs for large new projects like the Brunton site and the new Riverton Hospice Center. Much of the work the business is involved in enhances the whole community, which the owners of Sweetwater find deeply satisfying.

Sweetwater Garden has long had a mutually beneficial relationship with the local garden club. From sponsoring "Yard-of-the-Month" prizes to hosting open houses for State Garden Club Conventions-gatherings, Sweetwater loves to encourage the most passionate gardeners of the community. The philosophy at Sweetwater is to try to have as much interesting plant inventory as possible in this size market. Kim hopes that in fifty years the plantings in his community will reflect a nurseryman who really cared.

Kim and Wendy appreciate all Sweetwater Garden's customers and SBA's support. For new and innovative ideas in gardening, Kim and Wendy invite you to stop by Sweetwater Garden on West Main in Riverton.