



Daily staff photos by Rich Cooley

Jean Fogle surrounds herself with a variety of angel landscape figures available for sale at Fort Valley Nursery. Fogle's pictures of the angels appeared in *Country Living Gardener* and it started a whole new business for her and her husband, Terry. They closed their florist shop and started a mail-order business, selling the figures.

Flying High

By Donna Dunn

In the last year, Fort Valley Nursery has closed its florist shop and started a mail-order business, all because of a little angel.

Actually, several angels — sleeping, praying and even laughing angels — set in concrete created the impetus for the business.

The celestial idea came when Jean Fogle, one of the owners of the 14-year-old Woodstock business, had her freelance photographs of the angels featured in *Country Living Gardener*. The angels, hiding beneath bushes and standing amidst flowering beds in Mrs. Fogle's backyard, created a focus for the photos.

The magazine offered to include ordering information with the feature.

"Country Living wanted to know if we wanted a little blurb about where to get them," said Terry Fogle, Jean's husband. "We said, 'Sure.'"

The information, printed in small type in one corner of the page, referred readers to the back of the magazine.

People immediately began placing orders, Fogle said. "The article came out and the phone calls start-

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Fogle said the nursery then had to figure out how make the foot-tall, 14-pound angels fly. At first, they encountered some cracked statues and broken wings. With extra cardboard and a mountain of peanuts and packing paper, though, they found the right combination.

Mailing concrete isn't cheap. The average cost for shipping the angels is \$15. Yet, the cost didn't deter customers, Fogle said. The angels, without shipping, cost between \$24 and \$34.

"I think there's a national craze," Fogle said. "[Angels are] just so popular."

He said the angels also are appealing because the nursery advertises them as being made in the "Blue Ridge Valley of Virginia." The Blue Ridge is known around the world as a picturesque, peaceful setting, Fogle said.

A family-run business near Harrisonburg actually produces the angels and many of the other concrete items sold at Fort Valley Nursery.

Since the *Country Living Garden-*



This is a concrete figure of an angel praying. Mrs. Fogle's pictures of the angels have appeared in many magazines. The business also reaches customers by the Internet.

er feature, Mrs. Fogle's photos have appeared in a number of other magazines, including *Women's*

Day, *Birder's World* and *American Homestyle*. The angels often appear in "new products" sections.

With each new publication comes more calls for the angels.

In November, the owners of the nursery decided to close the 9-year-old florist shop and begin the mail-order business. Renovating space and moving inventory around, the Fort Valley Nursery created an office and storage space for the venture.

Fogle said the venture broadens Fort Valley Nursery's customer base.

"This gives us a national and international market," he said. Most of the orders come from the West and Midwest, he said.

Fort Valley Nursery also employed the Internet to reach audiences. But the owners soon found that the Internet must be coupled with other publication vehicles, Fogle said.

"What we've found is that the Internet in and of itself is not enough," he said.

The latest magazine article appeared in the April issue of *The*

Costco Connection, the publication for Costco, formerly known as the Price Club.

"We had a really big response from that. The phone rang off the hook for weeks," Fogle said.

Along with the angels, they began offering about 15 other items, mostly garden accessories. Yet, the angels continue to keep guard over the business.

"The angels are still the mainstay of what we sell," Fogle said.

He said before the national response, the angels were just one of many garden statues sold by the nursery.

But interest in garden accessories has been on the increase, he said. Gardeners now want more than just beds of flowers, he said.

"A garden needs to be more than plants," he said. "People are looking at them as outdoor living spaces."

Just as a garden needs more than plants, a business needs more than one market, Fogle said. The mail-order angels answer that prayer for Fort Valley.

"We saw an opportunity and we decided to venture into it," Fogle said. "As a business owner, that's important. Not only to keep it new and interesting and exciting, but to keep growing."