

Signal BUSINESS

Lines, Lines, how do your orchids grow?

By CARI GERVIN
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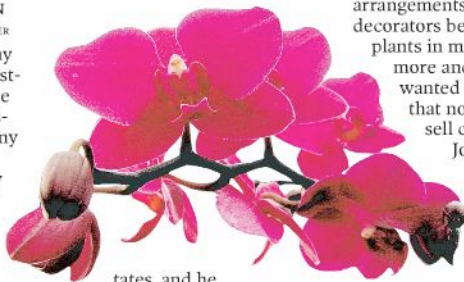
Lines Orchids, Inc. may be the mountain's best-kept secret. Although the nursery has been in existence since 1947, not many people realize that it is open to the public every weekday.

"That's our biggest misconception," said owner Joan McCandless.

The second biggest misconception, she said, is that orchids are hard to grow.

"People think they are, but they're not. The flowers are fragile, but the plants are very hardy," Ms. McCandless said.

Having grown up with orchids, Ms. McCandless might be at a bit of an advantage. Her grandfather, Oliver Lines, grew orchids in England before moving to the United States in 1910. He continued to grow orchids on large es-



tates, and he passed his talent to his son John, who moved to Signal in 1943 to work for Rivermont Orchids.

A few years later, the pair decided to start their own company. For a time, there were four orchid growers on Signal. One by one, they went out of business until the Lines bought out Rivermont in 1972 and became the sole orchid grower on the mountain.

For years the business sold mainly cut flowers for use in

arrangements. But as interior decorators began using orchid plants in magazine spreads, more and more people wanted to whole plant, so that now Lines doesn't sell cut flowers at all.

John Lines still works in the greenhouses with his daughter. They grow four different families of orchids. Ms. McCandless said she doesn't specialize in exotic and rare orchids but she does hybridize the breeds that she has, seeking unusual colors or patterns.

After an orchid blooms, the plant forms a seed pod. Ms. McCandless will pollenate the seed pod and then let it mature on the plant for six months. Once the seed pod has matured, it is shipped to California, where a high-tech firm plants the seeds and ships the



Joan McCandless stands with a number of orchids that are finally old enough to sell.

PHOTOS BY CARI GERVIN

From germination to vibrant blooms



Clockwise from lower left, Joan McCandless reaches for the pod of a future hybrid orchid. She will pollenate the seed pod and then let it mature on the plant for six months. Once the seed pod has matured, it is shipped to California, where a high-tech firm plants the seeds and ships the flats back to the mountain. (These baby orchids were planted in January.) After six months or so, the tiny plants are repotted in their own containers. After another year or so in the greenhouse, the orchids are full-size and in bloom, ready to be sold to shops in Birmingham, Nashville, Atlanta and Chattanooga.

flats back to the mountain.

After six months or so, the tiny plants are repotted in their own containers. After several repottings and more than a year in the greenhouse, the orchids are full-size and in bloom, ready to be sold to shops in Birmingham, Nashville, Atlanta and Chattanooga.

Ms. McCandless said that most of her plants are sold out of town. But Sophie's and the Clay Pot in North Chattanooga and Ensign the Florist in Ross-

ville carry Lines' orchids.

Right now the orchids at Lines are in full bloom. Ms. McCandless explained that while the shop always has something blooming, the peak time for orchids to flower is from February to May.

She said the flowers are the reason she loves her job.

"You get to see something pretty every day," Ms. McCandless said with a smile.

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