



Above: CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS: Clarke Central High School Class of 2015 alumnus and Cozybear Nursery owner and founder Deijhon Yearby holds a pink chrysanthemum outside of one of his greenhouses on Sept. 29. Throughout the three years of owning his business, Yearby has built relationships with his customers. "I'm honest with them and I don't put up (an) advertising wall or try to use promotional tricks and stuff," Yearby said. "I'm just gonna say, 'Hey, I have a really good quality plant here and if you need help keeping it alive, I will help you. I don't want you buying from me because you think it's a sympathy thing.'" Photo by Lucas Donnelly

CULTIVATING A DREAM

CCHS Class of 2015 alumnus and Cozybear Nursery owner and founder Deijhon Yearby has pursued his passion for plants through his business.

BY ISABELLA WESTRICH
Variety Editor

LAYOUT BY MAYA CLEMENT
Lead Copy Editor

Planting, watering, pruning, fertilizing and caretaking— Clarke Central High School Class of 2015 alumnus and Cozybear Nursery owner and founder Deijhon Yearby carefully nourishes each of what he calls his plant babies from seed to sprout to

fully-grown flora.

Less than 10 years after graduating high school, Yearby has built a career for himself as a farmer and entrepreneur, tapping into his passion: plants.

"I haven't had a plant I wasn't able to grow. I grew a banana tree and they don't even really grow in this area," Yearby said. "There is some type of feeling you get when you take that one small little plant and you can grow it into this gigantic thing."

Yearby's journey with greenery started during his time at CCHS, where his teachers and classes helped him discover his passion and inspired him to pursue a career in agriculture.

"When I was in school, I always told all my teachers (that) I hate being inside," Yearby said. "So one of my teachers was like, 'Okay, well, you just answered the question of: Do you want an inside job or an outside job?'"

(Former CCHS Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) department teacher Jeff Holland) got me into the (agriculture) world by making us do all the chores that he didn't want to do in the greenhouse."

After graduating from CCHS and earning a degree in Agricultural Science

from Athens Technical College, Yearby worked as an Assistant Farm Manager at Williams Farm for Athens Land Trust (ALT). His dream, however, was to work for himself as the owner/manager of a nursery, where plants are started from seeds and grown to be bought and planted by customers.

"(Yearby has) always struck me as never, ever really being content with what he's got going. He always thinks it can be better so he's constantly striving to make his business better. He's also a really hard worker and he's really passionate about farming and growing plants," Williams Farm Manager Steph Nivens, who works with Yearby almost daily, said. "It's impressive to see somebody so young who knows what they want (and) where they want to go."

As Yearby worked towards his dream of owning his own nursery, the Athens community provided him the support he needed.

"Working through (the ALT), I really got to see the (Athens) community. I like to say there are small bubbles within this town, and if you don't branch out from your bubble you just don't know what's going on," Yearby said. "The best way to describe Athens is it's a community where if you do bet on yourself, there are people here that will support you."

One of the community members that supported Yearby was Amy Flurry, who owns and operates a boutique communications and development firm in Athens. Flurry met Yearby while he was working at the West Broad Farmers' Market through the ALT.

"He was working with other people (at the West Broad Farmers' Market) and he was just very open, very positive, he acknowledged (me), and that was how

"There is some type of feeling you get when you take that one small little plant and you can grow it into this gigantic thing."

-- DEIJHON YEARBY,

Cozybear Nursery owner and founder and CCHS Class of 2015 alumnus

"I'm really glad that he puts his enthusiasm out there for us to see."

-- BRIAN ASH,
CCHS English department teacher

I got to know him because I was a regular shopper there," Flurry said. "Because he knew I worked with entrepreneurs, we just had great conversations and I could see he was piecing together what it meant to be a farmer."


In 2019, Yearby achieved his dream and was able to open Cozybear Nursery after working for about three years with the ATL and operating a market garden to make money.

"Working for (Williams Farm) was awesome, but I also felt like, 'Man, I don't really like doing this at all.' I know a couple of people that really enjoy vegetable farming, but in the back of my mind I was like, 'I hate weeding and I hate harvesting. The only thing I like is when we grow plants,'" Yearby said. "So (when Cozybear Nursery opened), I just felt a sense of ease, like, 'Yeah, I feel like this is the right move.'"

CCHS English department teacher Brian Ash taught Yearby while he was at CCHS, and has enjoyed watching him grow into his passion for agriculture. He believes that Yearby's dedication towards his goal makes him a role model for CCHS students.

"He's a kid who kind of blended in the crowd (at CCHS), but it really highlights and illustrates how special everybody is when they find their thing. I'm really glad that he puts his enthusiasm out there for us to see," Ash said. "That's what the kids need to see, they need to see people who've gone out and made it through (CCHS). They need to see there's lots of different ways to be successful."

Similar to Ash, Yearby hopes that CCHS students can learn from his journey and find a career in something they are passionate about.

"If you want to be (an) entrepreneur, be completely open-minded. You're not gonna know what you want to do so keep your options open," Yearby said. "If you're getting into (the agricultural world) because you want to make a lot of money, you're not going to be successful. But if you get into it because it's something that you're passionate about, then you will make a lot of money and you'll be happy." 



Above: CHRYSANTHEMUMS AND COMMUNITY: Clarke Central High School Class of 2015 alumnus and Cozybear Nursery owner and founder Deijhon Yearby's orange chrysanthemums are displayed at Cozybear Nursery on Sept. 29. Yearby has given back to the Athens community through his work with plants. "When I was selling vegetables people would say how they stopped eating at fast food places because they would eat vegetables," Yearby said. "Now that I sell plants, I sell herbs and people say they planted herbs in their yard and now they can pick the fresh herbs from there." Photo by Lucas Donnelly

Left: PLANT BABIES: Clarke Central High School Class of 2015 alumnus and Cozybear Nursery owner and founder Deijhon Yearby waters his plants at Cozybear Nursery on Sept. 29. Yearby has put a lot of effort into taking care of all of his plants. "Every day I come out here, do a walkthrough of all the plants, make sure there's no bugs, make sure there's no dead leaves. After that, I sit down (and make a) gameplan. What needs fertilizer? What needs to be pruned? What needs to be moved out of the sun? What actually needs water and what doesn't need water?" Yearby said. "I feel like all of these are my babies." Photo by Lucas Donnelly