

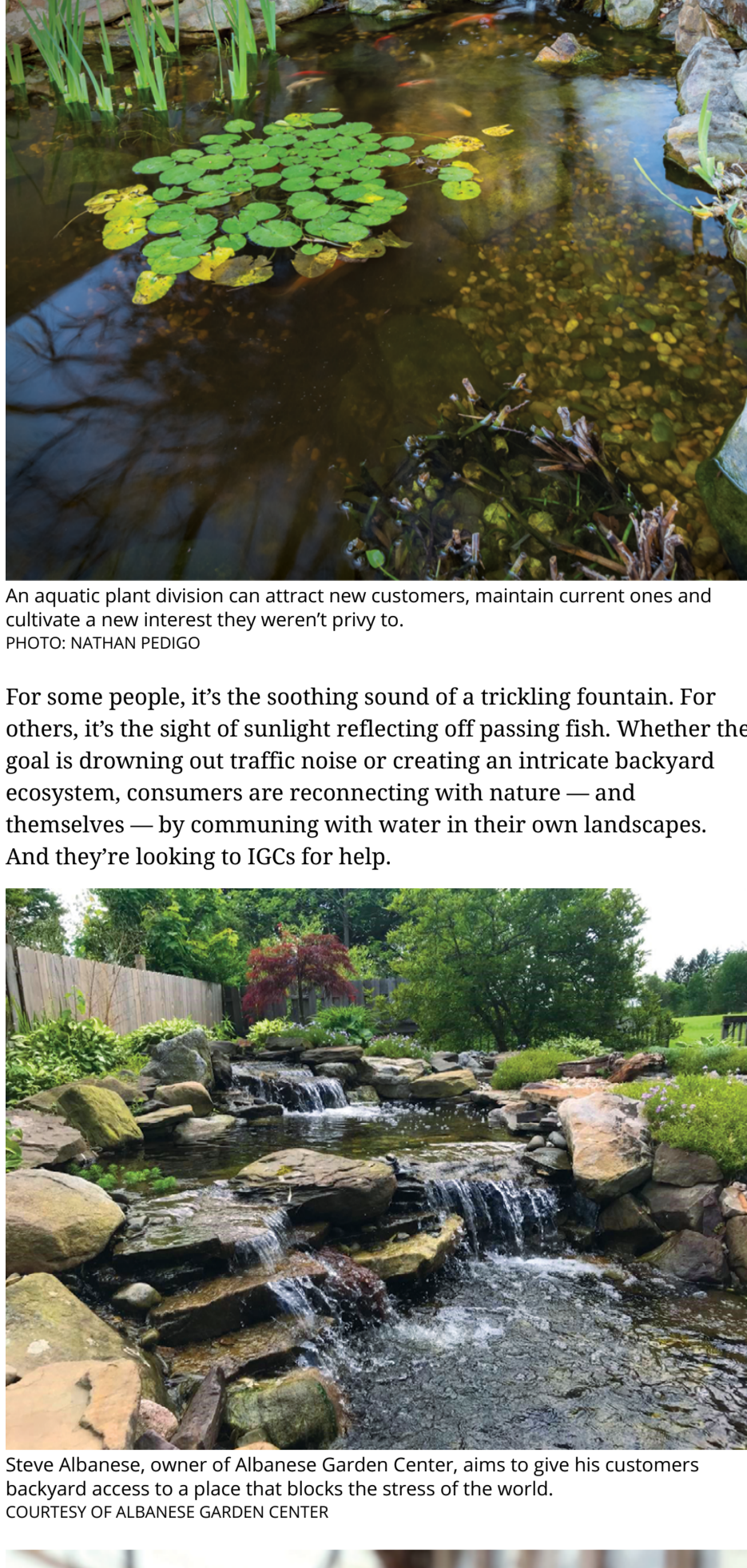
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COVER STORY

Water feature wonders

Ready to catch the wave? Independent garden centers with a passion for aquatics share how they make the category work.

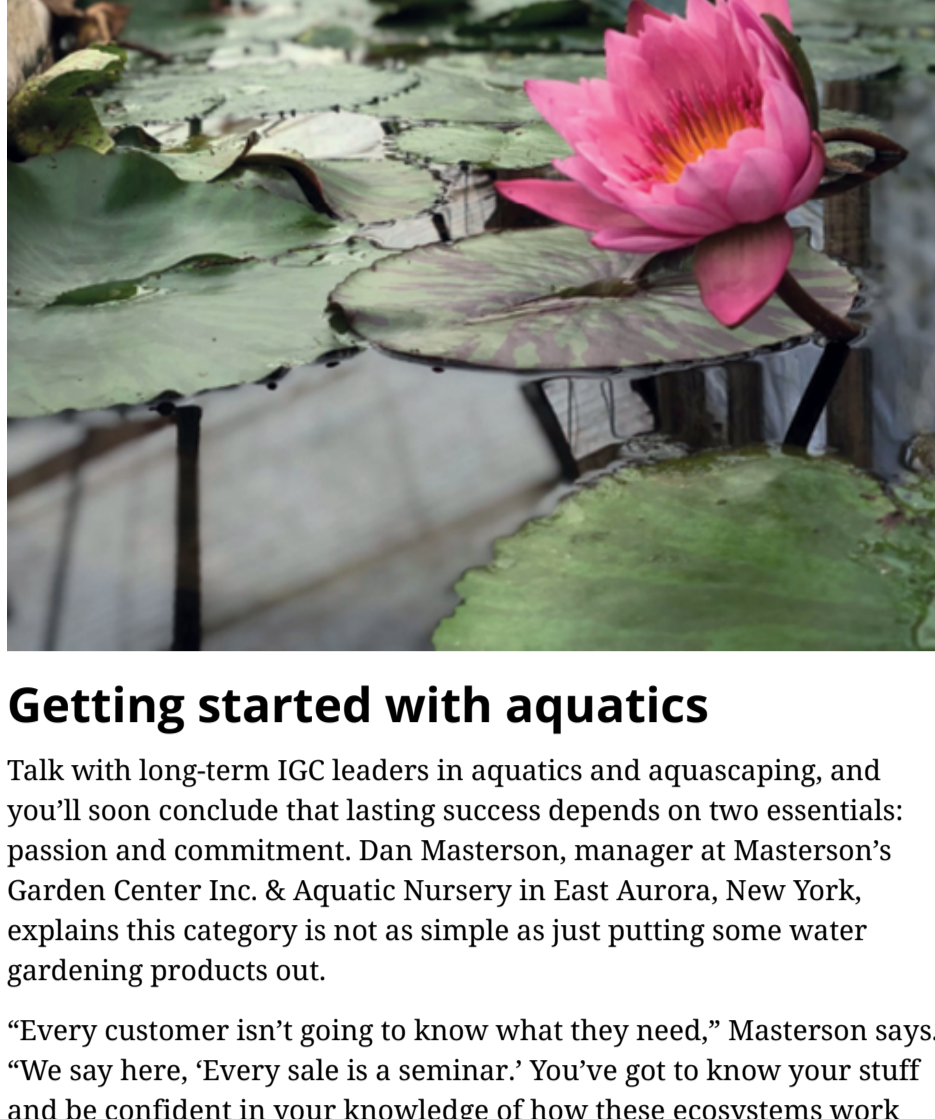
Jolene Hansen



An aquatic plant division can attract new customers, maintain current ones and cultivate a new interest they weren't privy to.

PHOTO: NATHAN PEDIGO

For some people, it's the soothing sound of a trickling fountain. For others, it's the sight of sunlight reflecting off passing fish. Whether the goal is drowning out traffic noise or creating an intricate backyard ecosystem, consumers are reconnecting with nature — and themselves — by communing with water in their own landscapes. And they're looking to IGCs for help.



Steve Albanese, owner of Albanese Garden Center, aims to give his customers backyard access to a place that blocks the stress of the world.

COURTESY OF ALBANESE GARDEN CENTER

Getting started with aquatics

Talk with long-term IGC leaders in aquatics and aquascaping, and you'll soon conclude that lasting success depends on two essentials: passion and commitment. Dan Masterson, manager at Masterson's Garden Center Inc. & Aquatic Nursery in East Aurora, New York, explains this category is not as simple as just putting some water gardening products out.

"Every customer isn't going to know what they need," Masterson says. "We say here, 'Every sale is a seminar.' You've got to know your stuff and be confident in your knowledge of how these ecosystems work before you put it on the shelf."

Water gardens have been a Masterson specialty since the IGC's founder, Dan's father Mike, started incorporating water features into the business's landscape side nearly 30 years ago. Inspired by his enjoyment of a creek near his home, he wanted to help others experience something similar. "His success far exceeded his expectations," Masterson says.

For Steve Albanese, general manager at Albanese Garden Center and Greenhouse in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania, his love of water was nurtured by aquariums, scuba diving and woodland waterfalls. Starting an aquatic division at the IGC founded by his grandfather seemed like a natural fit. "I just wanted people to have an area in their backyard where they could get away from the stress of the world," he says.

Albanese, who credits part of his success to his qualification as a Certified Aquascape Contractor (CAC), says passion for the aquatic category is critical. "If you don't have passion for it, you need someone on staff who does," he says. At Albanese, a fourth generation of the family has inherited the love of aquatic work.



Derek Johnson, owner of JVI Secret Gardens, completed his first water feature about 16 years ago. Now, water feature construction is 65% of the business.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JVI SECRET GARDENS



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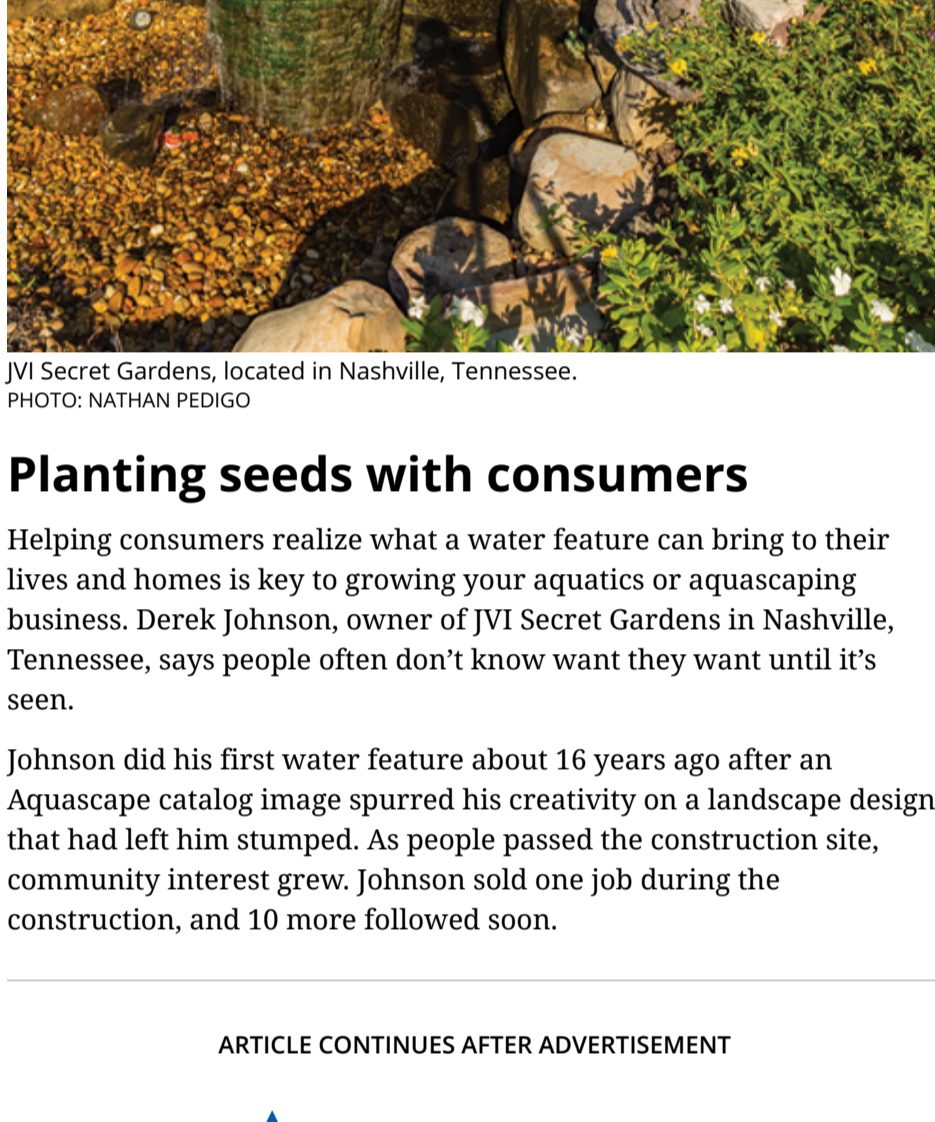


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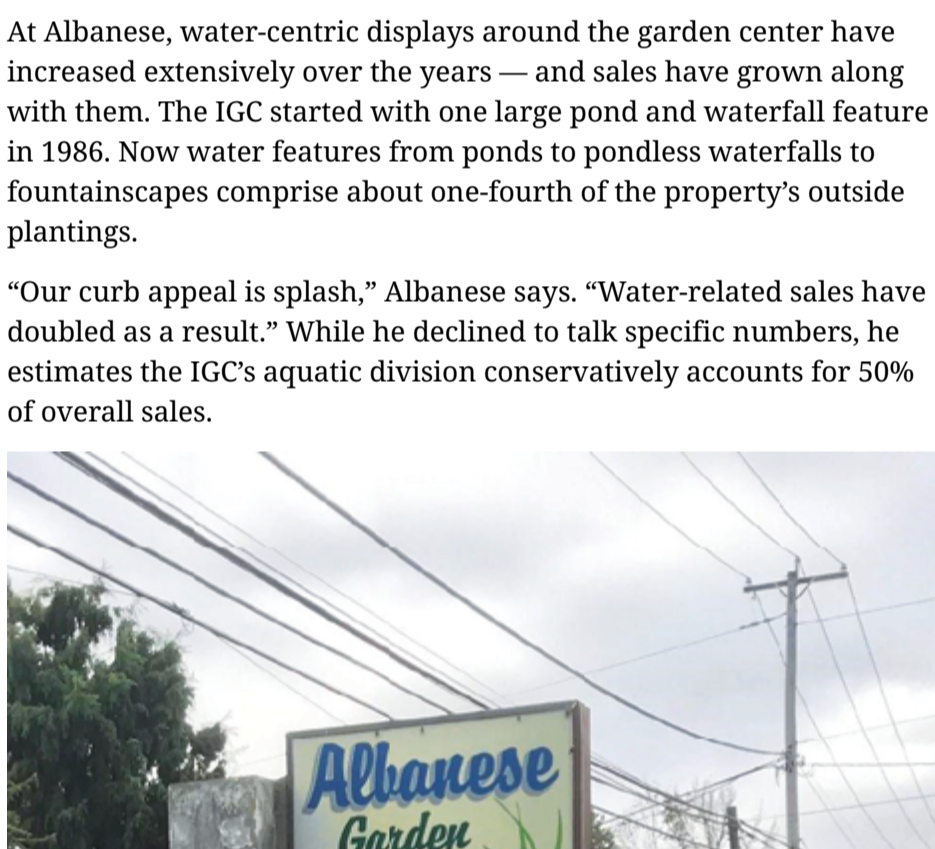


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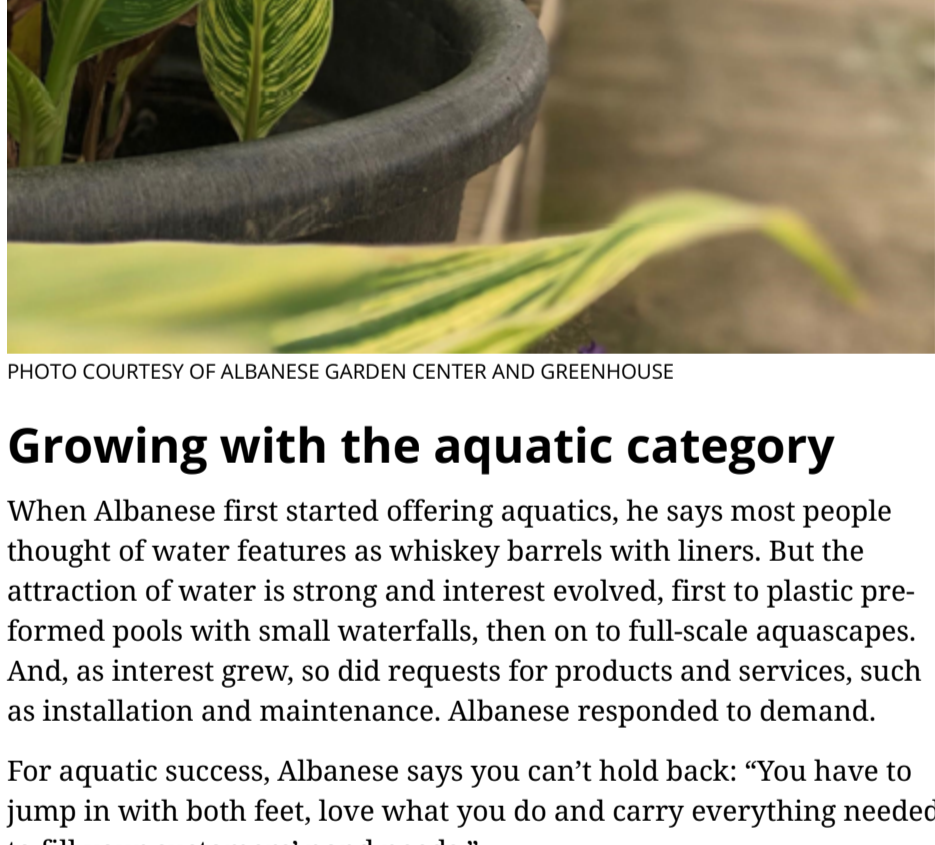


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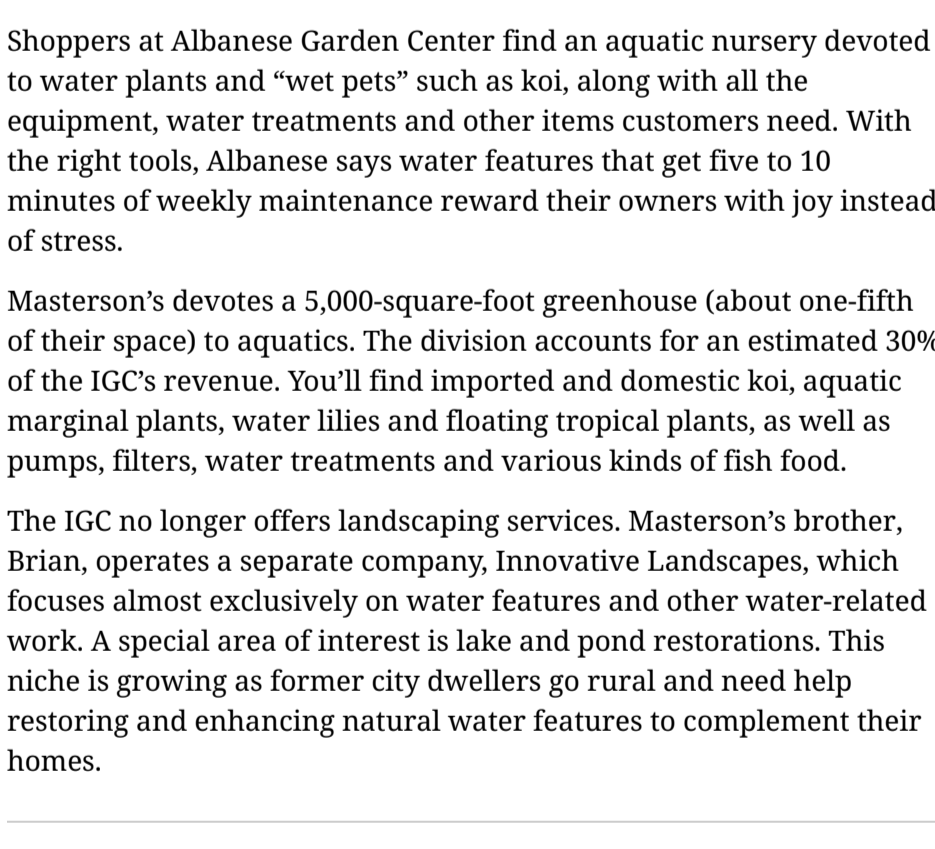


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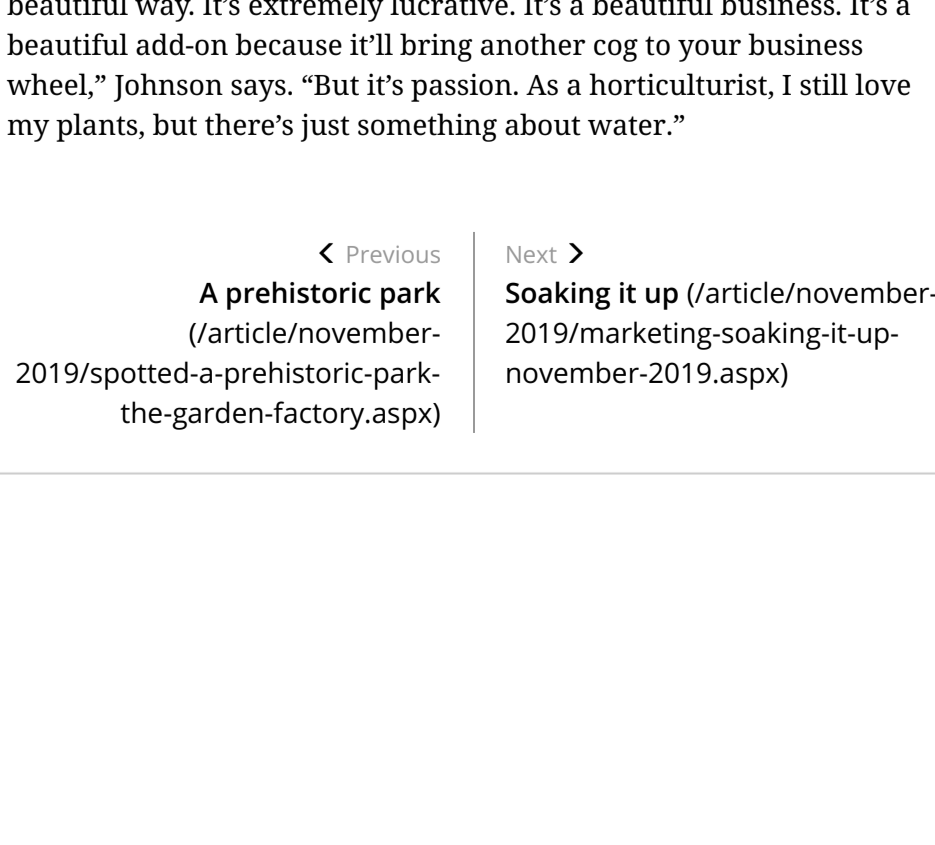


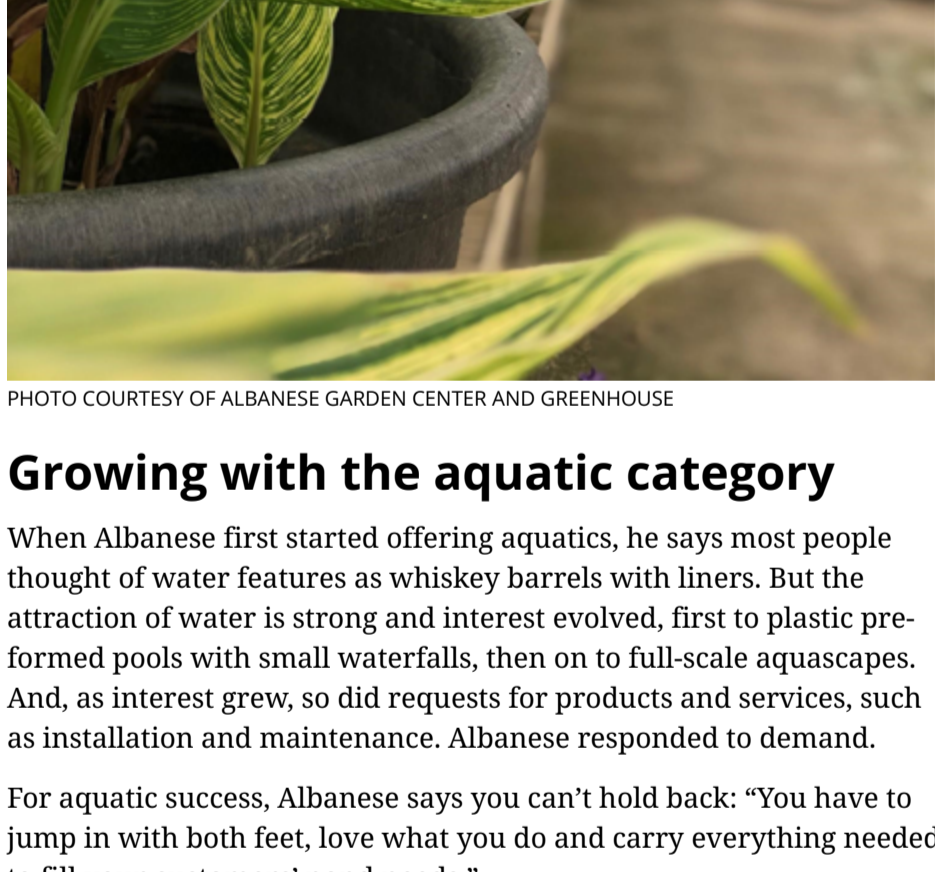
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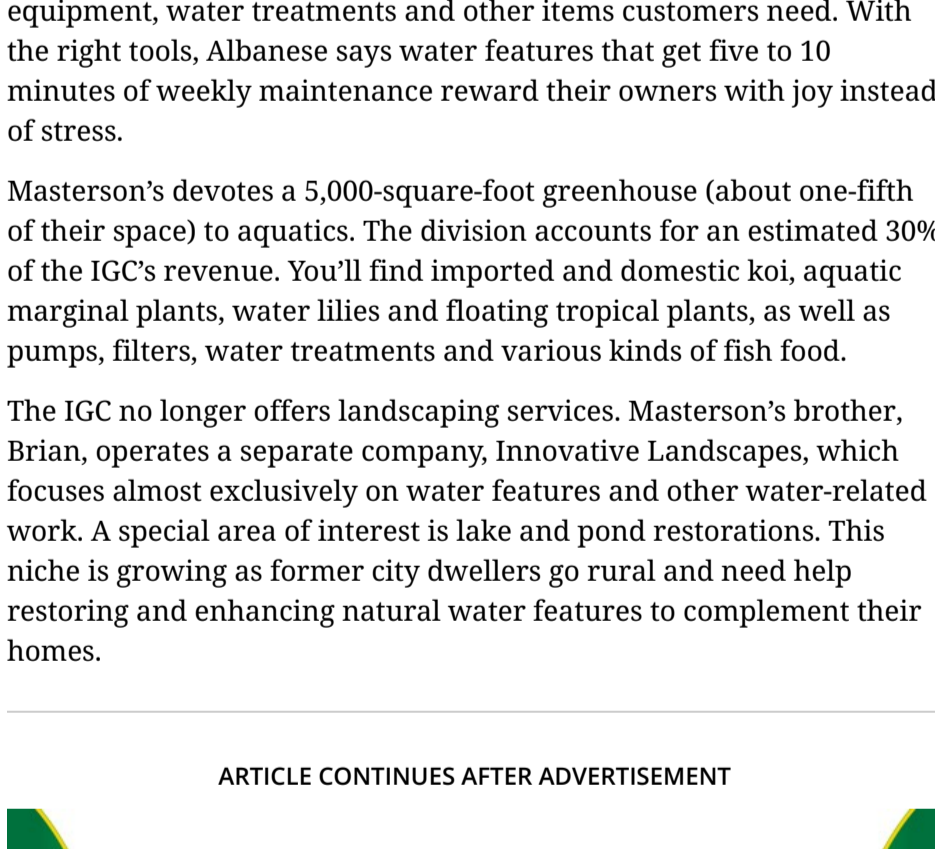
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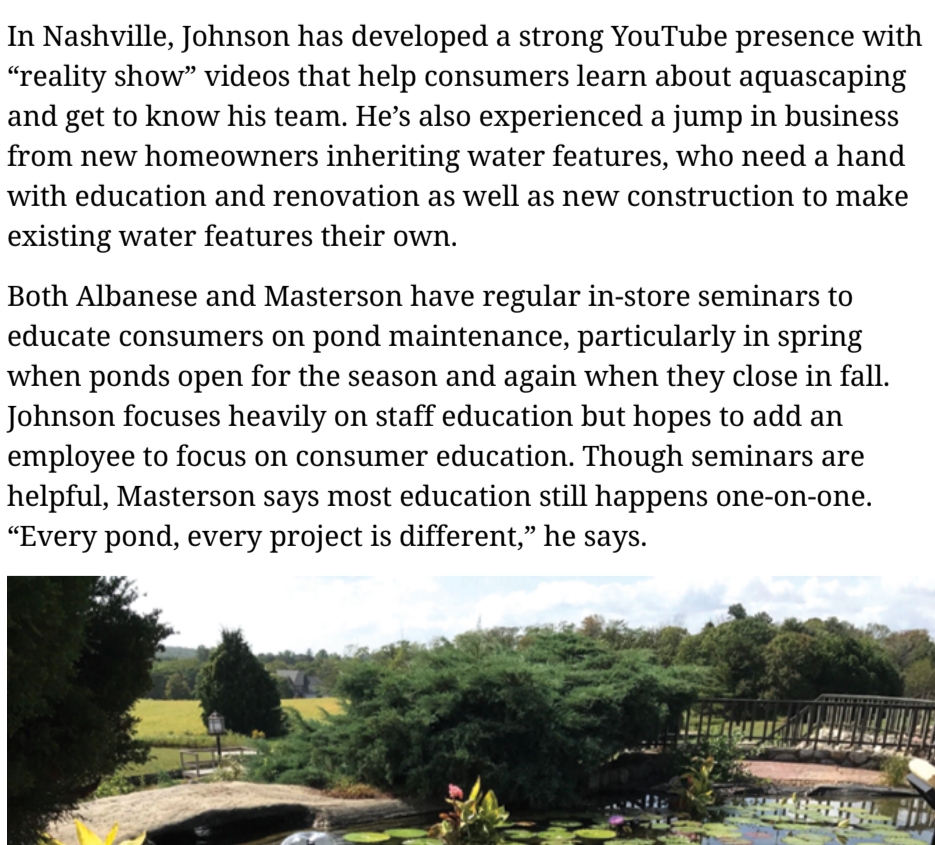
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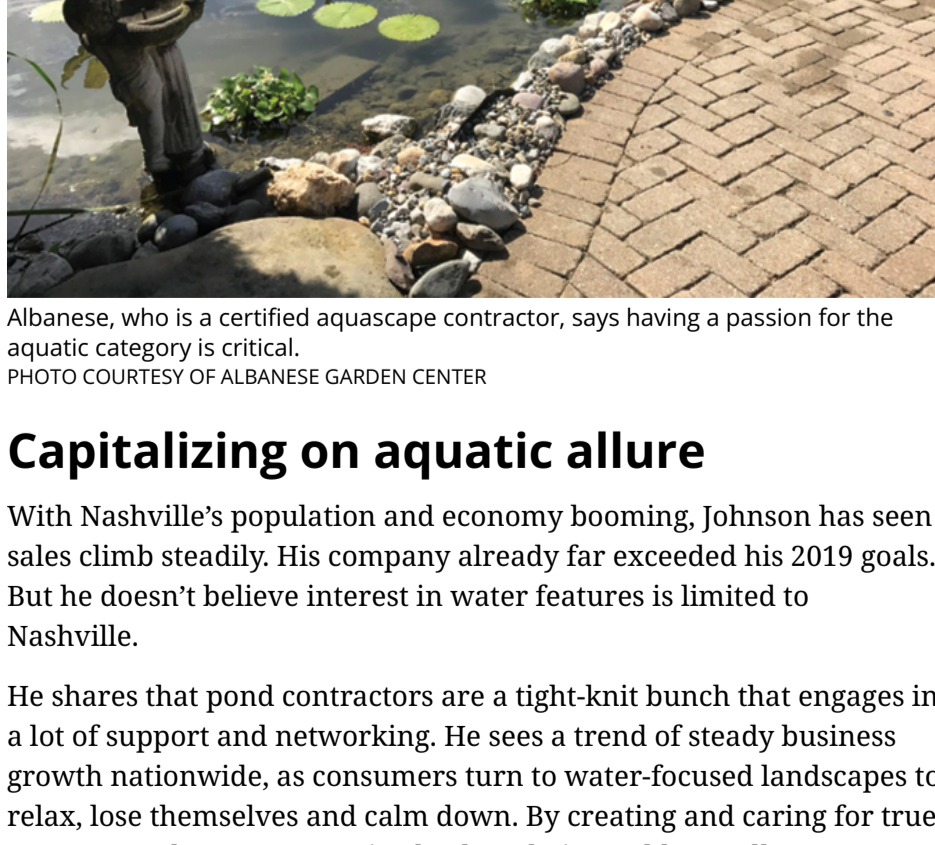
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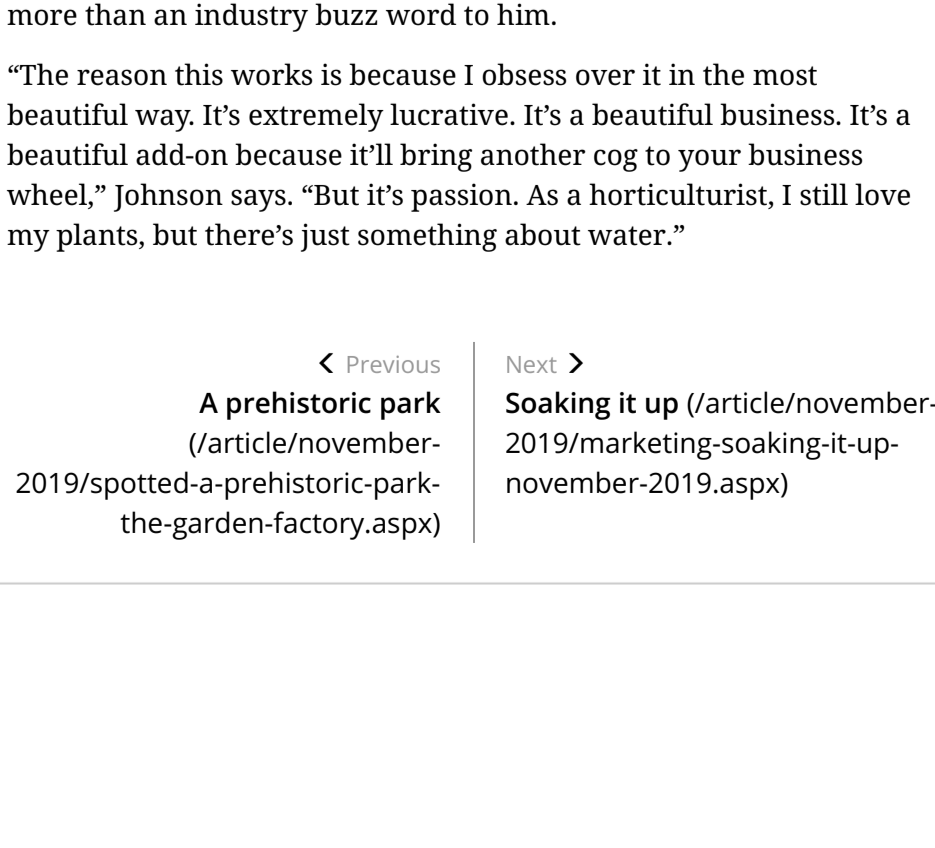
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