

# The Buffalo News

11/21/03

## Plants Nurture Office Creativity

By Lisa Haarlander

I've always enjoyed having a few plants surround my desk. They create the feeling of a lush island in a sea of beige file cabinets, brown carpet and glowing computer screens.

But now I've got another reason to surround myself with tropical plants (besides their ability to purify air). Researchers at Texas A&M University have found that fresh flowers and plants boost creativity and productivity. The researchers gave about 100 students a battery of tests to measure their mood and creativity. Then, they put the students in a room that contained either plants and fresh flowers arranged by a florist, three abstract sculptures or no decorations.

The men who participated in the study generated 15 percent more ideas and the women came up with more flexible and creative solutions in the plant-filled room, according to Roger S. Ulrich, the lead researcher.

Granted, the study was done for the Society of American Florists, but you could probably find a few hundred workers at Rich Products Corp. headquarters on Niagara

Street that would agree.

Inside One Robert Rich Way is a tropical plant-filled atrium that covers three-quarters of an acre. Each minute 3,000 gallons of water rush over the atrium's 15-foot replica of Niagara Falls. The sound of falling water is a pleasant change from the normal office background noise of ringing phones and co-workers' conversations. The atrium is the brainchild of the company's chairman and founder, Robert E. Rich Sr., who brought in 48 truck loads of soil to create the garden.

"It was very innovative when we built it," Rich said. "Atriums have come into vogue in the last few years. When our people go to lunch or need a break they can walk through there."

To keep the plants looking their best, Rich hires Botanicus, an indoor landscaping company, to water and maintain the atrium.

"The people all feel they're in a natural setting," said Kathryn A. O'Donnell, president and CEO of Botanicus, which is based in Amherst. "You can sit or eat lunch in the garden even during a snowstorm."

Some of the plants in the Rich atrium and others that do well in an

office environment are:

- Pothos
- Dracaena (corn plants)
- Chinese evergreens
- Kentia palm
- Rhapis palm (lady palm)
- Adonidia palm
- Ficus trees
- Spathiphyllum (peace lily)
- Calathea (prayer plants)
- Philodendrons
- Sansevieria (snake plant)
- Schefflera

Smaller plants often look their best when grouped together. Consider putting three different plants in one large pot. First, choose a plant that has some height, such as a small palm or corn plant. Then, choose a plant that will fill the top of the pot, perhaps a prayer plant. Finally, choose a plant that dangles over the side, such as pothos or a philodendron vine.

Even if you don't become more productive, your desk will look better.