ALIVE—ALIVE-O

PET AGE VISITS A FRESH WATER FISH SUPPLIER

by Richard L. Shotke

ALMOST EVERY PET RETAILER looks fondly at his tropical fish department as a consistent assistant in meeting the monthly bills. But seldom has he had an opportunity really to become acquainted with the steps involved in bringing these appealing customer-attractors to his shop.

From the Far East, from South America, from sunny Florida open-ditch farms, and from all-enclosed operations throughout the country fish suppliers are flourishing. They are supplying the ever-increasing demand for more and different tropical fish which has created an expanding sales-base for tanks, plants, food and a burgeoning variety of allied equipment.

Good tropicals don't 'just happen', however. Reputable suppliers who are effective in responding to retailer's needs and efficient in doing so at reasonable rates are experienced professionals who pay painstaking attention to detail. Because each of these operations is different, PET AGE wished to describe one which combines several services so you could get a broader picture.

One such operation includes an extensive on-site breeding of many species plus importing of numerous special types, the raising of both common and unusual aquarium plants, the sale of live food, personalized delivery to nearby states and shipping throughout the world. AQUATICS, INC. of Norridge, Illinois is an all enclosed operation. It is a ground level facility with 12,000 square feet devoted to five different departments.

MODERN PLANT

An attractive waiting room welcomes visitors to the site. While inspecting an appropriately coffin-shaped tank filled with active Piranhas, one is aware of the quiet efficiency of the modern office, set up to handle the added details that a five-year 800% increase in business has generated. Emphasis on telephonic communication is evident at the desks of Don Boeing and Harry Hanson who deal directly with over 90% of the 500 retailers presently being served by Aquatics.

Invoice, inventory, billing and extensive equipment for accurate records is maintained. Supervising the entire operation is Jack R. Boeing who bought the then small operation in 1966.

Immediately north of the office is an impressive **Tank Holding Room.** This hatchery, occupying well over half of the entire space is maintained at an 83° constant climate by a radiant heat system. It holds over 100 vats each of



TANK HOLDING AREA essentially is climate controlled room with four long tiers of tanks ranging from large concrete vats at base to small glass vessels along top. Note tubes leading to each tank to supply air.

which has an individual control to provide the particular temperature needed for a specific type of fish. Here some 250 species, ranging from the most common Guppy to Tetras, Barbs and Angels are housed.

The vats and tanks are three-tiered and easily serviced by catwalks along each side. Most of the 20 employees have some kind of responsibility in this room since every tank is invariably cleaned and sterilized between batches of fish, and constant surveillance is maintained to make sure that all occupants, including any new arrivals are eating and in good health.

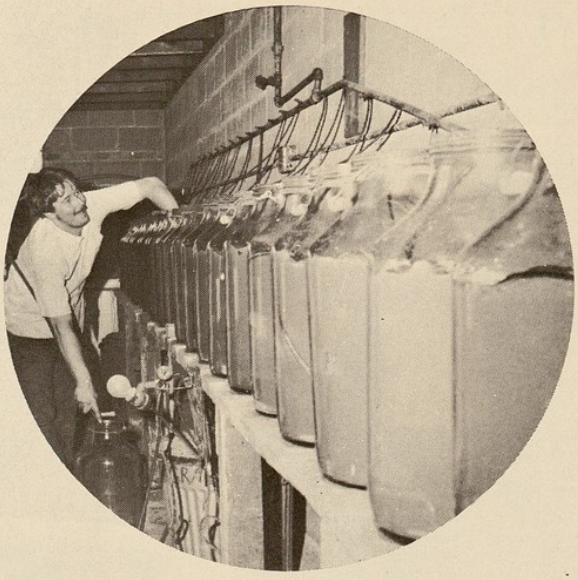
Along one complete wall of this room are ceiling-high shelves on which 4,000 small containers provide a holding capacity for 4,000 male Bettas, one to a container. Although a good community tank fish, which quite probably will spawn with a female Betta, the male will fight if exposed to another male.

GOOD BREEDING

South of the tank room is a large, very hot and humid **Breeding Room.** Several hundred small tanks provide space and flexibility so that over 20 kinds of fish were spawned here in 1971. Under the close supervision of Jack Boeing and 2 other staff persons 15% of all the tropicals that Aquatics shipped last year were bred and raised here on these premises. Among the more common bred here were Black Tetras; Tiger, Gold, Albino Barbs and most Gourami species, but also some less familiar types included Albino Pristella and Piranha.

A unique feature of this room is the rain water collection system. It provides a completely natural water environment during the breeding period for varieties such as the Tetras. As soon as the spawning is completed, the fish are transferred to vats filled with well water.

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LIVE BABY BRINE SHRIMP tanks provide staple for Aquatics' feeding program and some for pet shops as well.

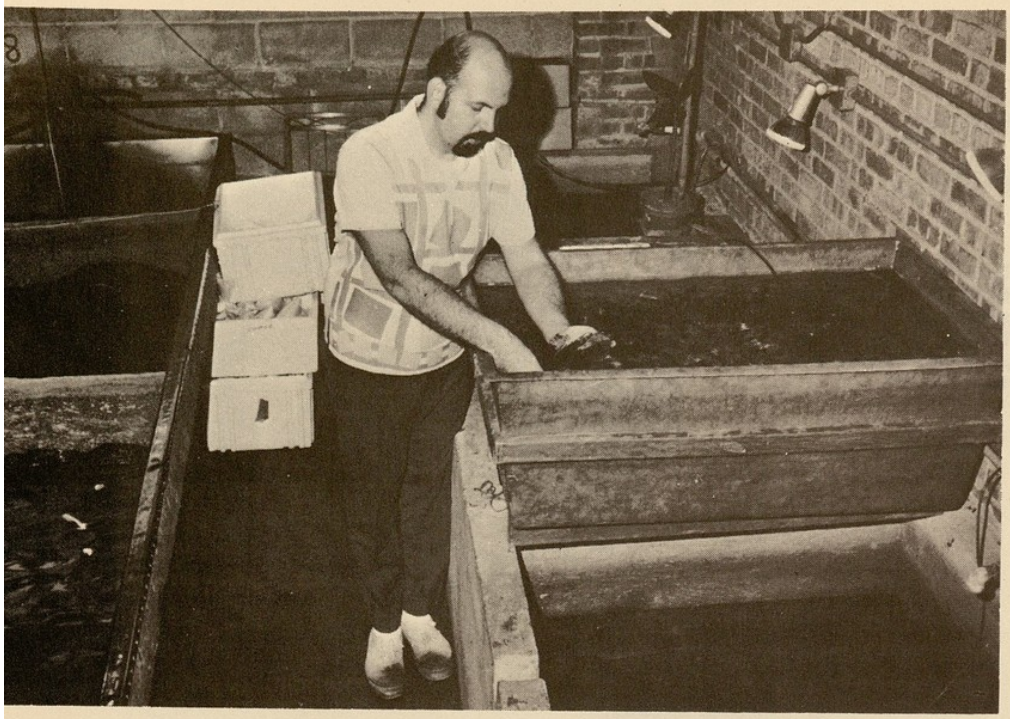


4,000 ISOLATION CONTAINERS for male Bettas to prevent fights with other males. Fred Boeing checks the shelves which cover one entire wall of Tank Holding Room.



SHIPPING AREA IS FINAL QUALITY CONTROL station, where livestock is double checked for proper type, number, condition and packing immediately before order leaves.

The Museum of Aquarium & Pet History



ALIVE— ALIVE-O

PRODUCTION OF QUALITY AQUARIUM PLANTS remains a matter of individual attention to growing vats, light intensity and condition of water.

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This is one factor in Aquatics' regular regimen to avoid shock. From the moment of a fish's arrival until it is safely deposited in the pet shop's own tank, great pains are taken—in the receiving room, in the holding area, the shipping department and in the delivery process steps are deliberately undertaken to minimize dangers through changes of temperature, Ph, and even bacteria count.

PLANTS, TOO

Bright lights, a cooler climate and many shallow vats make up the **Plant Room.** Here 30 to 50 varieties of quality plants are stocked. They range from inexpensive ones favored by discount houses such as Cabomba, Anacharis and Hygrophila to more sophisticated, cultivated, tank-raised aquarium plants free of algae, such as Isoetes, Madagascar Lace and Amazon Swordplants. Packed with wet paper in plastic bags, during 1971 some 5,000 shipments were delivered to fish customers.

RECEIVING—SHIPPING

Adjacent is the **Receiving Room** where shipments of imports from South America, the Far East or the U.S. are brought in by Aquatics' own pickups from nearby O'Hare International, the world's busiest airport. Here new arrivals are checked carefully. When imports come from rough Amazon jungle areas or from Far East Ports such as Hong Kong, preventative medication sometimes is required. Perhaps Tetracycline and Copper Sulphate for the Tetras, or a compound of Dehydrostreptomyicine and Penicillin for some live bearers may be helpful.

As every shipment arrives a sample of the water in the bag is analyzed. A sterile tank is prepared. Ph is made identical so that batch of fish doesn't suffer any shock. New fish are never mixed with those already in stock. Then the tank water is gradually brought to normal Ph such as would be found in the tank at an average pet shop. Close daily inspection is continued to assure that the fish are healthy and eating properly.

Aquatics feeds its fish as well or better than the average hobbyist. Twice a day, all fish able to eat them get live baby brine shrimp which are hatched in jars right in the plant. Granulated or flake food also is provided, as are live goldfish or bait for the larger fish which need it.

DELIVERY SERVICE

Finally the shipping department is located conveniently close to the office because, while Jack Boeing spot-checks every operation, understandably he is particularly interested in the condition and quality of orders on their way to customers. Eight employees act as fish catchers, two others bag all fish in a very light Methylene Blue and Tetracycline solution to keep down the bacteria count. Finally, the order is properly oxygenated and rechecked by a specialist as he boxes it for each individual shop.

Another staff person independently handles the entire plant order, selecting, packing, preparing for shipment, and coordinating it with the livestock order.

Quality control is rigid, and timing is planned most carefully. All bag packing is done as close to the shipping time as possible.

Because it is close to the world's busiest airport, shipping into and out of Aquatics via direct flights is simple. In addition, its central location has enabled Aquatics to offer a unique service to the six surrounding states. Using its own thermostatically con-

trolled, heated trucks, Aquatics' qualified drivers cover two routes, Tuesdays through Fridays, in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa and Ohio. The livestock is handled only by Aquatics' own employees, trained to take care of tropical fish. The unit price includes this personal delivery into the hands of the retailer who is requested to inspect the shipment and encouraged to refuse delivery if any serious flaw is noted.

FRESH WATER FISH

With today's expanding interest in the tank field, dealers often have to request unusual types of fish. Jack Boeing indicates that he handles anything available anywhere in fresh water fish, "It may take three weeks for a really rare specimen, but most kinds can be produced almost immediately. Another thing, we never hesitate to pick up the phone to find out where an order stands. If it means calling our back room or Bangkok, we can almost always give a retailer a firm delivery date".

He explained, "We raise most popular varieties such as Black Tetras, Tiger Barbs, Kissing Gouramis, Bettas and Guppies. But we also import and then hold and condition many others such as Black Angels from the East or rare Tetras from South America. We now are completing arrangements for direct imports from Africa".

"Our most popular sales begin with Guppies, believe it or not. Not the common Guppy but fancier ones such as Red Deltas, King Cobras and German Half Blacks. Then come the Neon Tetras and hearty fish such as Zebra Danio, Black Tetras and Angel Fish. Finally, live bearers are always in demand, as well."

"People ask for some unusual fish, also. Within a couple of weeks we can provide an Electric Eel from South America or a Fresh Water Sting Ray or a Red Tailed Cat. In stock right now we have the rarest Catfish in the world, three Synodontis Angelicus. They are blue with white polka dots."

TELEPHONE TOGETHERNESS

Most orders from shops are called in. Aquatics accepts collect calls when people are placing orders. But it also has an open phone policy for dealers who have any fish problems, whether or not the stock was received from the Boeings. Generally Aquatics is able to tell the dealer where he has gone wrong or what he should do to get his fish back to tip-top shape. "We call anywhere in the world to determine when shipments are coming in. Also, when orders for rare fish come in we try to provide phone instructions about how to treat them. Some fish, like Clown Loaches or Sting Rays are succeptable to Ph shock, so we share information about a method of introducing them into the pet shop aquarium that we have found works best for us. We always are free with advice because, loving living creatures, we try to give any information needed to keep them alive", Don Boeing stated.

SPECIALISTS IN TROPICALS

"As pet subjects get more and more complex, everyone is looking to the specialist to give accurate information as well as good stock. That is why we deal 99% in fresh water fish, aquatic plants and a few food products for the convenience of our retailer customers. Since we try to feed our fish in the way we feel a responsible pet store will, we do feel an obligation to offer our customers live, adult Brine Shrimp, Tubifex Worms, and Glass Worms (in season) as well as bulk flake food. If the shop owner repacks and sells it, good for him. He can get his own customers coming in every week for a little treat for their fish. It has to promote other sales", Jack Boeing philosophizes.

Both brothers started as hobbyists, themselves. Jack first spawned Bettas in his basement and now has a large tank of assorted Tetras—Neons, Cardinals and Albino Pristellas in his home above the plant (where he is conveniently located for nightly inspection tours of heating equipment and for the inevitable emergencies in this kind of business).

Don has a hexagon tank in his living room with an assortment of Tiger Barbs, Albino Barbs, Gold Barbs and Long Fin Barbs.

Since Jack Boeing started with Aquatics as an employee in 1959 he has learned much. He bought it in 1966 when it had 6 employees. It now has grown to a staff of 18 to 20, depending on the season. There has been an 800% increase in business in the past five years. He feels that this remarkable expansion is a direct result of continued interest in the customer.

Aquatics believes in advertising its products to reach potential customers. It also participates in some local trade shows and makes valiant efforts to establish personal contacts through visits to the shops of its clients. However, its major promotional effort is internal. That is, it strives most of all to satisfy its customers through service and quality. □

BREEDING ROOM'S UNIQUE rainwater collection system insures natural environment in each of hundreds of tanks during spawning. Constant, careful concern about temperature, light, food and air produce good fish.

