Two Visionary Floral Leaders Receive Industry’s Highest Honor

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Sept. 14, 2015 — Del Demaree Jr., AAF, of Syndicate Sales Inc., in Kokomo, Indiana, and Charles F. Walton of Smithers-Oasis in Kent, Ohio, received the floral industry’s greatest honor on Sept. 12, induction into the Society of American Florists (SAF) Floriculture Hall of Fame. The announcement brought hundreds of industry members to their feet for standing ovations during the Stars of the Industry Awards Dinner held in Amelia Island, Florida, at the close of the association’s 131st Annual Convention.

“The Floriculture Hall of Fame is truly the floral industry’s highest achievement,” said SAF Awards Committee member David Gaul, AAF, of DWF Wholesale Florist in Denver, Colorado. “Being chosen for this prestigious honor means that the recipients have made a permanent and significant contribution to the advancement of floriculture.”

About Del Demaree Jr., AAF

Most second-generation business owners build on the achievements of their predecessors. But when Del Demaree Jr., AAF, took over the family business, it had fallen on hard times and was just getting by. Through hard work, persistence and dogged determination, Demaree took the company to heights the first generation would never have dreamed of.

Raised on farms in Michigan and then outside of Kokomo, Indiana, Demaree’s first taste of being an entrepreneur was when he sold chickens from the family farm door to door. During that time in the mid 40’s, Demaree’s father spent four days a week farming and three days on the road selling giftware to florists. It was around this time that the family business was born.

During his travels, Demaree Sr. came across a water tube, which he modified. This unique product kept a single flower stem alive by providing a continuous source of water. On Demaree Sr.’s sales routes, he showed it to customers and they liked it, so he took out a second mortgage and built a mold to start producing the water tube.

Soon, Demaree, his brother Bill and cousin Marianne were packing customer orders for Aquapics behind the farm’s grain shed after school. Those three made up the workforce of the new company, Demaree Molded Plastics. Today, the Aquapic continues to be used by florists worldwide, and what Demaree Sr. started on his sales trips became the foundation for the company we know today as Syndicate Sales.

Demaree often went on selling trips with his mother, visiting what they called “syndicate stores” — namely
Woolworth’s, Kresge and Newberry’s. Demaree’s mother Fern had a philosophy: “You don’t eat until you sell something.” His mother believed that hunger would spawn creativity and persistence. That credo sunk in because to this day, Demaree has trouble taking no for an answer.

In the 10-year span from the mid 50’s to mid 60’s, Demaree graduated from high school, got married, started a family, served as a manufacturers rep for several hardgood companies and graduated from Indiana University. By this time the manufacturing side of the business had gone bankrupt but the selling arm of Syndicate Sales remained. When his father retired in 1967, Demaree became president.

From there, the company’s growth took off due to Demaree’s vision and entrepreneurial drive. By this time, products such as the Aquapic, the Design Bowl and Everlastin’ Baskets were three widely used staples in retail shops across the industry, but Demaree introduced a series of products that broke new ground.

In 1968 Demaree introduced Fronzwood containers, the first structurally molded plastic container lines that had widespread acceptance. The Candelite Cardette became the standard in the industry. Hoosier Glass marked the company’s first diversification from plastic products. The Garden Collection of European-inspired glass containers remain the highest volume shapes used by retail florists today.

And Syndicate’s vases made with a new injection blow molding technique put an end to vases leaking at the seams. In 1981, the company also unveiled a full line of wedding products, and in 1994 began offering floral preservatives and foam under the names Aquaplus and Aquafoam.

While Syndicate’s product line under Demaree’s direction continued to expand and influence all parts of the industry, he also sought out leading-edge solutions to other challenges, most notably the unnecessary slowdown in the supply chain.

In 1981, Demaree formed Hurryin’ Hoosier Transport, a delivery system that integrated customer route calling with weekly deliveries anywhere in the United States. This helped the wholesaler stay competitive by keeping inventory dollars down and inventory turns up.

Demaree also understood the advantage of new technologies often before others did. In 1988, Syndicate was the first company to use barcode shipping to add a new level of transparency and accountability into the supply chain. Demaree also pushed Syndicate to become among the first in the industry to implement online ordering.

In addition, Demaree has been ahead of the curve in leveraging social media to engage customers. In fact in 2012, Syndicate built its own studio and began filming and producing a series of videos aimed at providing retail florists with expert design tips and techniques.

Throughout his career, Demaree dedicated a tremendous amount of time and energy to give back to the industry through participation in SAF, Wholesale Florist & Florist Supplier Association (WF&FSA), the American Floral Endowment (AFE) and many other associations and organizations.

He was SAF’s president from 1981 to 1983 where he worked on the national Floraboard marketing program and dedicated hours to making Grandparents Day a flower-buying occasion. Demaree also served on several SAF committees, most notably the Government Relations Committee where he was active in policy development. And Demaree has been an active participant in SAF’s Congressional Action Days, almost since its inception.

Demaree was also AFE chairman from 1992 to 1993 and served on the WF&FSA board of directors and as it treasurer. Demaree received WF&FSA's Leyland T. Kintzele Award in 1998, the American Institute of Floral Designers Industry Award of Merit and was named the Michigan Floral Association’s Wholesaler Tradesman of the Year.
In addition, throughout his career Demaree has dedicated extensive time and effort on community
endeavors earning him recognition from groups such as the United Way, the Kokomo Mayor’s Advisory
Council, the YMCA and the Howard County Hall of Legends.

Demaree is a 1985 recipient of the Chancellors Award from Indiana University at Kokomo and has served
on the University board of advisors. He also has been a member of the Kokomo Symphonic Board of
Trustees and served on countless other boards in his community.

During his career, Demaree often said his goal was to sell more flowers to more people more often, and
he has worked tirelessly toward that goal his entire career — even back when he, his brother and his
cousin were packing Aquapics behind the grain shed on the family farm.

When he wasn’t trying to sell more flowers to more people more often, Demaree took great pride in being
together with his family. With five children, some in the floral industry, and 16 grandchildren, Demaree is
kept busy with family get-togethers, sporting events, birthdays and anniversaries.

**About Charles F. Walton**

When Charles F. Walton joined Smithers-Oasis in 1975, his
initial job description was simple: generate sales, develop
marketing campaigns and help develop new products. Those
who knew him then thought he was up to the job, but they didn’t
anticipate how far he would take the company over the course of
the next three decades.

During his tenure, Walton transformed Smithers-Oasis into one
of the country’s premier developers and manufacturers of post-
harvest care and floral design products with locations in 19
countries. Along the way, Walton earned a reputation as a
strategic risk-taker who embraced innovation in product
development and manufacturing.

He also made a conscious effort to create a workplace
environment that encouraged service to the industry. He did this
while mentoring and supporting his own team members and
encouraging them to take on high-profile roles in industry
associations and organizations.

After graduating from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo where he
studied ornamental horticulture, Walton worked for the Davey
Tree Expert Company in Canton, Ohio. In 1975, the Smithers
family came calling with an opportunity at the company. Walton rose quickly, excelling in marketing, sales
and product development before purchasing the company himself 11 years later in 1986.

That year, Smithers-Oasis was still best known for its foam and floral design products. But Walton had
grander plans for the business. He wanted to grow the company through strategic expansion and
acquisitions. He also had plans to involve Smithers-Oasis in every stage of the life cycle of flowers and
plants — ultimately with the end result of giving the consumer a more positive experience with flowers and
plants in their homes and places of work.

Between 1986 and 2010, Walton established the company’s presence in Japan, Denmark, Germany, the
United Kingdom, and Canada and also entered the commercial floriculture markets in Brazil, Mexico,
Colombia, Spain, Korea, China, Malaysia, India and Slovenia.

In addition, one of his most significant achievements was the acquisition of Floralife in 2007, thus making
Smithers-Oasis one of the leading suppliers of post-harvest products in the floral industry.

Walton’s penchant for experimentation also led him to confer with industry growers about a foam product that could be used to grow plants in a more sterile environment than that of traditional organic growing media.

Most notably, Walton developed a family of foam products used to support the propagation and transportation of young poinsettia plants. In that process, Walton took existing foam products and adapted them to the poinsettia, revolutionizing both propagation and the supply chain for the product. Walton ultimately introduced dozens of new products to assist growers.

While expansion, acquisitions and new product development are among Walton’s lasting legacies, he is also revered for his character and unimpeachable ethics.

He is known for setting the example of treating his employees, customers and suppliers with fairness and integrity. This is perhaps best underscored when he personally authored the first Smithers-Oasis Code of Worldwide Business Ethics in 1994. The code was anchored by the simple guidelines of: “Do what’s right, treat others with respect, and conduct all aspects of the company’s business in a manner that excludes considerations of personal advantage.”

In 2010, after serving as the company’s chairman for 24 years, Walton sold the business to a team of senior-level executives. That decision is another example of his dedication to both the company and the industry, stabilizing the company’s future for the next generation and keeping it managed by those who knew it best and had decades of experience alongside him.

One of Walton’s guiding tenets was: “If the industry won, the company won.” To that end, Walton encouraged his management team to support the industry through involvement in trade associations, research projects, infrastructure development, design and event shows, all forms of education and any other activity that would further the cause of floriculture in the United States and around the globe.

In addition, he contributed his own time and energy to industry groups and causes serving on a variety of SAF committees as well as on the American Floral Endowment’s Board of Trustees in 2002. In 2007, he served as coordinator for the highly regarded Seeley Conference, carefully building a series of talks around the topic of lean manufacturing, something he successfully implemented at Smithers Oasis. Walton has served in leadership roles with Cal Poly, The Kent State University Foundation, the Akron Art Museum and many other organizations.

After graduating from college and before starting his career in horticulture, Walton served in the Army. At one of his first duty stations in Panama in 1967, he met April Anieo, whose father was a full colonel inspector general for the Third Army. Their dates took them orchid hunting in the interior of Panama. Some of those orchids returned with them to the states after they married in December of 1968.

Together, they raised two children Melanie and Ben, and shared a life-long love of the natural world with them. Walton and April have an extensive home garden that includes an orchid greenhouse and a trout-stocked pond. Walton is an avid fly fisherman and hunter and enjoys writing and sharing stories of his adventures with family and friends.

EDITORS: Images from the SAF Awards Presentation and SAF Amelia Island 2015 will be posted on Flickr at [Flickr.com/SocietyOfAmericanFlorists](http://Flickr.com/SocietyOfAmericanFlorists).

The Society of American Florists is the leading organization representing all segments of the floral industry. SAF is proud to
provide marketing, business and government services to its members, including growers, wholesalers, retailers, suppliers, importers, educators, designers and allied organizations. The association was chartered by an act of Congress in 1884.