Lin Schmale Receives John H. Walker Award


The John H. Walker Award was established in 1979 to honor the contributions of SAF's former long-time executive vice president and recognize the important contributions of floral industry association executives.

“Lin is known for tenacity and fearlessness as well as collaboration and kindness in fighting for the floral industry every day on Capitol Hill,” said SAF Awards Committee member Robert Williams II, AAF, PFCI, Smithers-Oasis - North American Operations in Kent, Ohio. “A walking encyclopedia of the federal bureaucracy, she has a long and well-documented history for promoting teamwork and partnerships to accomplish the sometimes seemingly impossible.”

About Lin Schmale

For 21 years, Lin Schmale has represented the floral industry on Capitol Hill, advocating on its behalf, bringing together disparate people, groups and agencies and standing her ground, fiercely and often fearlessly, on issues that directly affect the livelihood of the growers, wholesalers, retailers and suppliers that she represents.

“Lin eats, sleeps and breathes the floral industry,” said Lance Osborne, Ph.D., professor of entomology at the University of Florida. “She knows her issues backwards and forwards.”

Known for her razor-sharp intellect and ability to quickly grasp and then distill the complexities of complex, often scientific issues, Schmale has played a lead role in ensuring the safe and efficient transport of flowers and plants across U.S. borders.

“Often, she’s better informed about the science of a given issue than the Ph.D.s in the room,” Osborne said.

Starting in 2002 when the pathogen Ralstonia first threatened to disrupt the country’s supply of geranium plants, Schmale ensured the floral industry maintained a strong, respected voice in discussions pertaining to disease and pest control. Leveraging her deep connections around Washington, she brought respected groups together to carve out realistic solutions that protected the short- and long-term interests of industry.
businesses. Without Schmale’s leadership, “the geranium industry could easily have been destroyed, with costs driven up and the supply chain totally disrupted,” said Clay Sieck of Sieck Wholesale Florist Group, headquartered in Baltimore.

She played a similar role in mitigating potential crises involving invasive species such as whiteflies, thrips and mealybugs and in negotiating the renewed transport of safe, disease-free chrysanthemums from Mexico to the United States — a flow of commerce that had been cut off for more than two decades.

“About 10 years ago, someone claimed poinsettias would become the Trojan Horse of a whitefly infestation,” Osborne said. “It had become a political issue, rather than a scientific one, and so Lin organized a bunch of industries — cotton, vegetable, ornamentals — that don’t usually talk to each other and got them to present a unified voice, backed by real science. She prevented a crisis and stood toe-to-toe with pretty powerful people in the process. We wouldn’t have even gotten to the table without Lin.”

Schmale also has led the industry in shaping policy on other issues, including the estate tax and immigration reform — an issue to which Schmale has dedicated more than a decade, and one that remains close to her heart. Through all of her interactions, she emphasizes candor and transparency, and people from both the industry and government place great trust in her word.

“If you are fair and honest with her, she’ll be fair and honest with you,” Osborne said. “She has more integrity than anyone I know.”

“She’s quite simply one of one in this world,” Sieck said. “No one else can do what she does.”

While she is frequently credited as being the most passionate person in any given meeting — and, in all likelihood, the most informed — Schmale also is known for her warmth and wit. Her skills around the Capitol notwithstanding, Schmale has long made a concerted effort to get outside of the Beltway, visiting farms and businesses in order to have a more complete understanding of the people and issues she represents.

Within SAF she has dedicated herself to SAF’s annual Congressional Action Days event, helping to inform and educate SAF members on the key issues of the day. She has also had a major role in developing the annual Pest and Production Management Conference, a must see for scientists, researchers and growers.

Among her many awards, Schmale was honored this year with the Executive Director's Award from the North American Plant Protection Organization. The award acknowledges the successful roles Schmale has played within NAPPO along with relationships between industry and government officials.

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