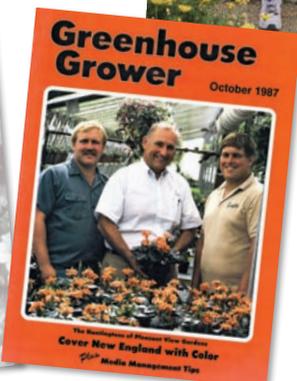
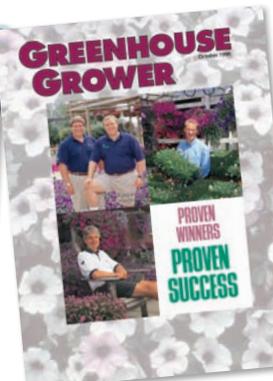
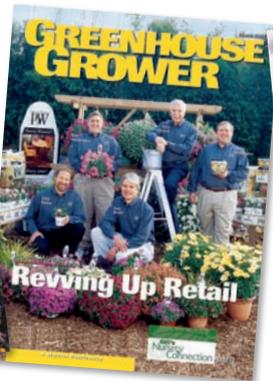




GROWER PROFILE

Featured five times on the cover of *Greenhouse Grower*, Henry Huntington is now a Proven Winners partner and co-owner of Pleasant View Gardens.

Checking In With: Henry Huntington



by **SARA TAMBASCIO**
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HENRY Huntington isn't a stranger to the cover of *Greenhouse Grower* magazine. Between being a founding grower member of Proven Winners, Bedding Plants International president and co-owner of Pleasant View Gardens, Huntington has appeared on the cover of *Greenhouse Grower* five times. The first time was in 1987, appearing along with father John and brother Jeff.

When we first wrote about Pleasant View Gardens, the operation's greenhouse area measured 130,000 square feet and it serviced the New England area. Today, the Huntingtons grow young plants in 460,000 square feet of greenhouse, work with contract growers, have a partnership with a stock facility in Costa Rica and deliver liners to wholesale and retail growers in all 50 states.

In 1996, Proven Winners was four years old, and the brand was having

its first test, facing the challenge of cementing its name with gardeners and consumers. Today, it is one of the most recognizable brands in horticulture.

Q: How do you deal with managing growth and the more complex demands of today versus 10 or 20 years ago? What are the new challenges? What challenges have always been there?

A: I'm not sure the challenges are much different today than they were 10 to 20 years ago; they are just more intense. We worried about labor then; we worry about it even more now. Probably the newest challenge we face is shrinking margins. We conquer that challenge by continuing to bring more value to the products and services that our company offers in the market. Hopefully this will translate into higher prices for our grower customers and the retailer. Our toughest challenge is to convince our customers that they can raise their prices. For those that have done it, they have seen great success and wonder why they didn't raise them sooner.

Q: How has Proven Winners stayed true to its purpose over time, while still evolving? What do you see for the future of the brand?

A: We have stuck to our core strategy of bringing the very best genetics to the market, supplying the highest quality rooted liners available and supporting that with leading-edge promotion to both growers and consumers. Our mission is to build a brand that gives consumers continued success, grows their confidence as gardeners and creates beauty for their lives. We will continue to do this with our current products and any new products we brand in the garden center.

Q: What is the role of the national/regional industry association? How has it changed and what has remained the same over time?

A: I do believe there is still a very important need for industry trade associations, education and government lobbying being the most important mission for the association. The need to bring people together to share knowledge and ideas will never go



GROWER PROFILE

away. Their challenge is on how to deliver that information with a shrinking membership base and so much competition from trade publications, the internet and too many trade shows.

Q: What are your thoughts on the sustainability movement and certification programs?

A: Consumers will continue to demand accountability in all the products they buy. I don't believe this movement will go away. I agree with many in the industry who say we need to promote the environmental benefits our products provide better than we have. But at the same time, we as an industry will need to look at our practices and procedures to see how we can do better. That's why I feel the certification programs that are available are a good idea. I would caution, however, that as the standards are being developed, we need to be sure we have a seat at the table to shape them to be

more sustainable without putting us out of business.

Q: Is the next generation being integrated into Pleasant View Gardens? What are their roles? What will be their challenges and opportunities in the future?

A: Being a family business has always been an important part of the culture of Pleasant View. We have built the business knowing that we would like it to continue as a family business. That said, we have continued to stress to the next generation that an opportunity is there only if they want to be a part of it. We would never force our kids to do something they don't want or have the passion for.

We have also made it a requirement that our kids work outside of the business for a period of time prior to coming into the business permanently. Our next generation is at the point now where one is working outside

the business, one is transitioning and others are in college or high school. I guess in the next few years we will find out.

Q: Do you have any opinions on collective marketing for the industry?

A: While collective marketing in principle seems like a good idea, I'm not sure our industry will ever embrace it. Our industry has always been very independent and I'm not sure we would ever agree on what or how to promote it. At the same time you could say it is already being done very well through programs such as Proven Winners and others. Some may argue that being targeted to a specific brand or variety may only help only that brand, I would argue that it is a benefit to all by building more excitement about our products with consumers and bringing increasing numbers into our retail markets. **GG**