



Chuck Buffington, head of Sales, Flowers Pro for Syngenta, addresses the crowd during the inaugural presentation of the Horticultural Industries Leadership Awards at the OFA Short Course in July. Syngenta's Lawn & Garden division, consisting of Syngenta, Fafard and Syngenta Flowers, sponsored the event.

# Taking the LEAD

**GIE Media, Syngenta's Lawn & Garden division honor some of the hort world's finest**

**Last summer**, the GIE Media Horticultural Group introduced the Horticultural Industries Leadership Awards, honoring representatives of each state along with five national winners who displayed extraordinary leadership qualities at their respective businesses.

The program culminated in a July awards presentation sponsored by Syngenta, Fafard, and Syngenta Flowers and held at the OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio. The following profile, on Wisconsin winner Larry Reit, typifies the inspirational stories of the various winners – all of whom set a high bar for 2012, when the program will introduce a new set of outstanding industry leaders.

Larry Reit, founder of Plant Marketing in Eau Claire, Wis., has two speeds – go and don't stop. For almost 40 years, Reit has used keen observation and sheer determination to build a large greenhouse, distribution and retail business.

He started in 1974 with one garden center and a flower shop. A decade later he began a wholesale business. Plant Marketing now encompasses 17 acres of greenhouses in Wisconsin for Easter lily, poinsettia, mum and spring bedding plant production, and 20 acres of greenhouses in Florida for indoor foliage. The Reit family also operates two garden centers in Eau Claire.

One of the keys to his success is observing and understanding every job necessary at his company, from the sticking line to shipping.

"I like to get involved and learn how to do the job," he said. "Then I can break it down and figure out the most efficient way to do it."

In the past couple of years the company went from a crew of 31 to a crew of 19, yet it increased total business and production space.

During that same time, Reit has built 9 acres of Nexus greenhouses.

"We've had the two best years we've ever had," he said.

In 1998, Reit tried to slow down. He sold the business to American Floral Services. But after watching the company he built start to falter under the new ownership, he bought it back in 2001 and hasn't slowed down since. **GM**

The 2012 HILAs will be presented at next year's OFA Short Course. If you work with someone who has shown outstanding leadership qualities and would like to nominate him or her, please e-mail your choice with a brief testimonial about the person to Greenhouse Management Editor Kristy O'Hara at [kohara@gie.net](mailto:kohara@gie.net).

## 2011 HILA greenhouse and allied business winners

**Larry Reit**,  
Plant Marketing LLC, Wis.

**Ken Altman**,  
Altman Specialty Plants,  
Calif.

**Stan Cope**,  
Bonnie Plant Farms, Ala.

**Heidi Wernett**,  
China Horticultural  
Business Services, N.M.

**Larry Harris**,  
Matanuska Gardens,  
Alaska

**AI Gerace**,  
Welby Gardens, Colo.

**Mark Sellow**,  
Prides Corner Farm, Conn.

**Rick Barboza**,  
Hui KuuMaoli Ola, Hawaii

**Jim Gapinski**,  
Heartland Growers, Ind.

**Bill Swanekamp**,  
Kube-Pak, N.J.

**Phil Lowe**,  
Lowe's Floral, N.D.

**Louis Stacy**,  
Stacy's Greenhouses, S.C.

**Bart Olson**,  
Olson's Greenhouse, Utah

**Chris Conant**,  
Claussen's Florist &  
Greenhouse, Ver.

**Bobby Barnitz**,  
Bob's Market &  
Greenhouses, W.Va.

**Wayne Gray**,  
Landon's Greenhouse &  
Nursery