

## Green Industry loses a pioneer

Burton Sperber, founder of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., will be remembered as a businessman, Korean War veteran, community leader, elite magician and devoted family man.

**C**ALABASAS, CA — Burton S. Sperber, FASLA, founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of ValleyCrest Landscape Companies, passed away September 30, 2011 at the age of 82 of complications from surgery. He was born May 14, 1929 in Los Angeles. An iconic figure in the landscape industry and respected business and community leader in Los Angeles for decades, he was counted on by titans in business and real estate to bring their projects to life through landscapes. Ultimately, he was revered for having created a world-class organization. But he preferred more simple recognition for his horticultural expertise as ValleyCrest's "head gardener" and his role as a devout family man.

Since founding ValleyCrest in 1949 at age 19, Burt led ValleyCrest's family of companies with vision and wisdom through more than six decades of dynamic growth. Under his leadership, ValleyCrest became the nation's largest, privately held integrated landscape services firm. Today, the Calabasas, Calif.-based company is led by Burt's son,

President and CEO Richard A. Sperber, who joined his father as co-CEO in 2008 after serving as President and Chief Operating Officer of the company since 2001. Prior to that, he served as President of the company's Development Division for seven years.

"The unexpected passing of my dad came as a complete shock to me, the family and everyone who knew him," said Richard A. Sperber. "I had the great privilege of working with him side by side every day and saw how he loved nurturing people. Nothing made him happier than watching everyone at ValleyCrest grow and seeing people do great things both inside and outside the company. He always encouraged us to do the right thing and was an

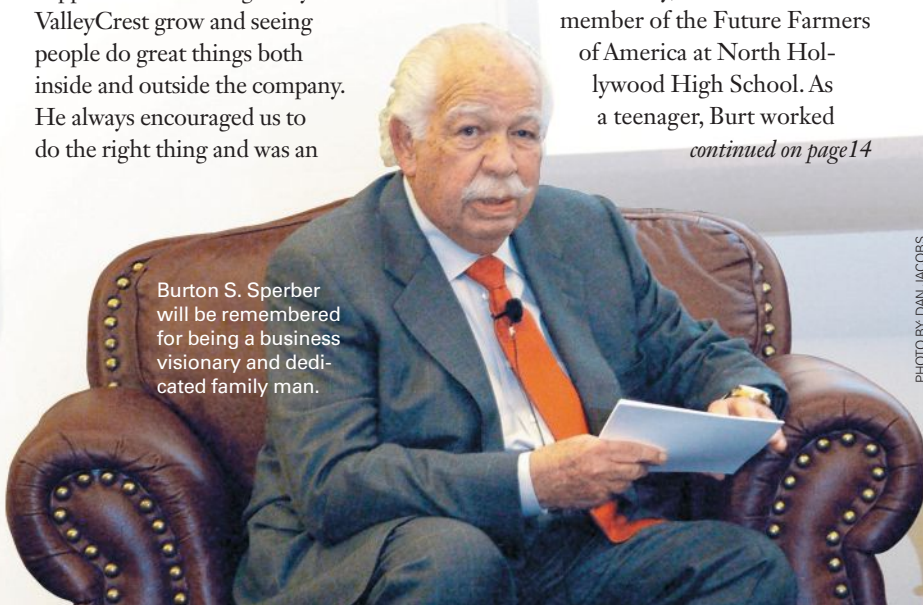
amazing family man. I'm taking on the personal responsibility to carry on his legacy and values he instilled in me as I lead the company forward."

Burt's hard work, dedication and shrewd decision making were coupled with an entrepreneurial spirit, keen sense of adventure and knack for understanding people. A pioneer in establishing high levels of innovation, professionalism and respect within the landscape industry, Burt was a founding member of several state and national landscape associations and was a Fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects (FASLA). He served as a Director of Los Angeles Beautiful and was a former Director of the Landscape Architecture Foundation.

Awarded throughout his career as a landscape architect, contractor, business executive and philanthropist, Burt's election into the Green Industry Hall of Fame in 2010, and his selection for the Lifetime Achievement Award for Contractor of the Year (1999) and the City of Hope Man of the Year "Spirit of Life" Award (1971), reveal his true legacy to business and the community.

Burt got his start in the landscape industry early in life. His father owned a retail nursery, and Burt was a member of the Future Farmers of America at North Hollywood High School. As a teenager, Burt worked

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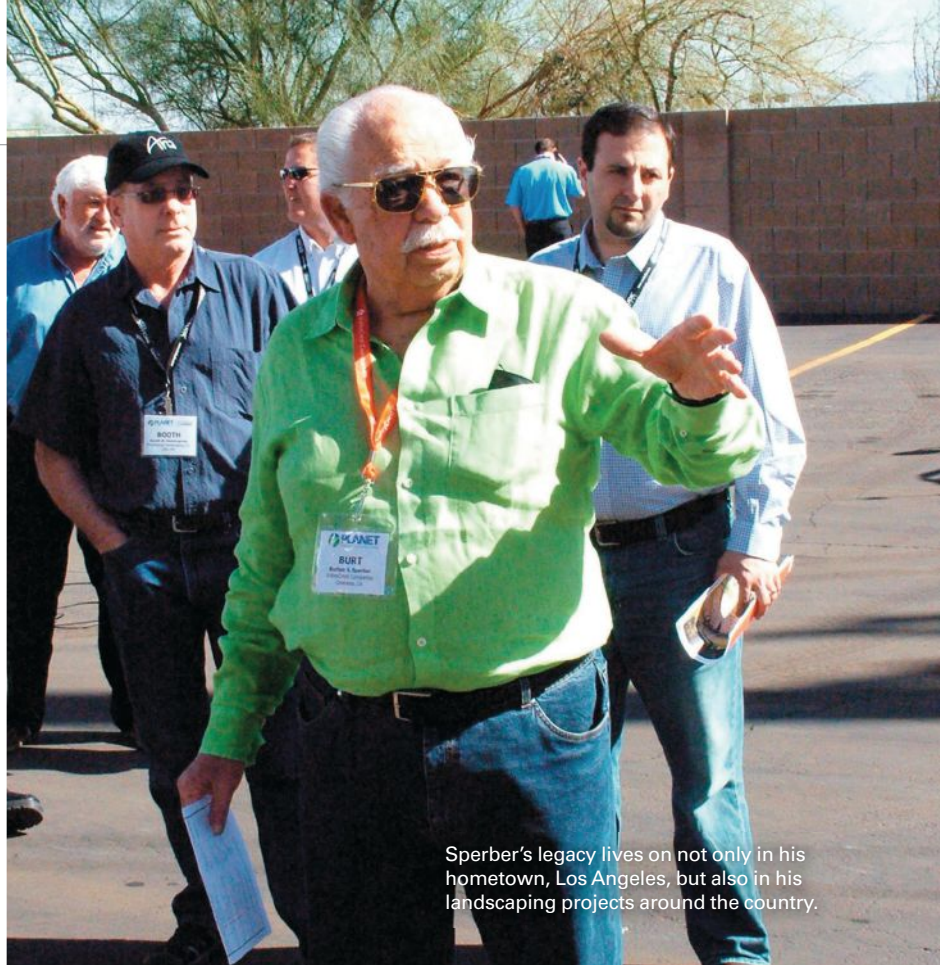
Burton S. Sperber will be remembered for being a business visionary and dedicated family man.

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after school at the MG Nursery in North Hollywood, CA, and a Sears, Roebuck and Co. nursery in Los Angeles. In 1949, Burt purchased the MG Nursery business with his father as a partner when the owner, Mos-simo Giannulli, passed away. Sixty-two years later ValleyCrest has more than 9,000 employees, operations in more than 150 locations nationwide, and is respected around the world. Even at 82, Burt came to work every day, revered by employees as the founder and chairman of a landscape services company that earned a spot on Forbes Magazine's 2008 list of America's 500 Largest Private Companies. ValleyCrest is counted on by architects, developers, commercial real estate owners, public agencies, property managers and luxury homebuilders to help create, build or maintain some of the world's extraordinary natural environments.

Among the hundreds of celebrated landscape projects in which the company has played a role are: Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Getty Center, the Palm Garden at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and The Grove, all in Los Angeles; The Garden of Flowing Fragrance at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino, CA; Americana at Brand in Glendale, CA; Fashion Island in Newport Beach; CityCenter, Cosmo-politan, Bellagio Hotel & Casino, two Wynn hotels and Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas; Disney's Animal Kingdom in Lake Buena Vista, FL; Sea World Discovery Cove in Orlando; Four Seasons Hualalai Resort in Kailua-Kona; Florida Marlins Stadium and SoundScape Park at Frank Gehry's New World Symphony in Miami; the Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, FL; Hudson River Park in New York; Dallas Center for the Performing Arts' Winspear Opera House and Wyly Theater in Dallas; Boston's Central Artery (Big Dig); the U.S. Federal Courthouse in San Diego; the U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; venues for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and 1984 Los Angeles



Sperber's legacy lives on not only in his hometown, Los Angeles, but also in his landscaping projects around the country.

Olympic Games; Dallas Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, TX; AT&T Park in San Francisco; University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, AZ; and Patriots Place in Foxboro, New England.

Equally passionate and accomplished as a magician, Burt was inducted as a member of the prestigious Inner Magic Circle of England, the highest degree a magician can earn, and was one of only a few Americans to achieve such elite ranking. He was also named Magician of the Year in 2011. His passion for magic encompassed a lifelong pursuit of collecting and writing magic books. His extensive collection is one of the largest in the country and includes rare books dating back as far as the 1500s.

Throughout his life Burt was active in many efforts to build and support the Jewish community in Los Angeles. He helped to build Temple Ramat Zion in Northridge, CA, where he was made a lifetime member. Years later he was instrumental in the building of the University of Judaism, now American Jewish University, located on Mulholland above the 405 freeway. He was also involved

in countless community, charitable and educational endeavors, including USC's School of Architecture and Cal Poly Pomona's Horticulture program.

A decorated Army veteran who served as a Master Sergeant in the Korean War, Burt is survived by his wife Charlene; their three children, Ellice Sperber, Michelle Sperber and Richard A. Sperber; a sister, Deanna Colton; and seven grandchildren. He was preceded in death by a daughter, Wendie Jo Sperber, and brother, Stuart J. Sperber. He met Charlene at age 16. The two were married in 1949, and for 62 years they enjoyed a perfect partnership in life. Along the way, they built a family and business. Charlene's practical management skills complemented Burt's strong work ethic and outgoing personality, a combination that earned him the respect of customers. Burt's meticulous attention to customer service endures as one of ValleyCrest's core values today. Burt's creative and adventurous side was balanced with his deep commitment as a native of Los Angeles to make the city a better place for all. **LM**