



## *His Career and Retirement Are Rooted in Plants*

By Lori Ward Bocher

When Editor Monroe gives me the name of the next "personality" for this "profile" page, he usually provides some background information on the subject. Such was the case when he asked me to interview Prof. Edward Hasselkus, University of Wisconsin-Madison Departments of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture.

"One of my favorite professors," Monroe admitted. "Former students love him. Respected and admired. Sophisticated. Ambitious and hard working. Tall, stately, debonair."

A week or two later I called Prof. Hasselkus and introduced myself.

"Is your maiden name Ward?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is Bill Ward your dad?"

"Ahhh, yes."

"Your father and I figured out a few years ago that we're very distantly related," he continued. "On the Lean side."

"You're kidding!" I answered. But in reality, I wasn't too surprised that we were related. After hearing Monroe's glowing remarks about Prof. Hasselkus, it only seemed natural!

Prof. Hasselkus is as native to Wisconsin as the Sugar maple. "I have Wisconsin roots all the way back to my great-great grandparents," he points out. He himself was born in Wisconsin. All three of his degrees were earned at the University of Wisconsin. He's been a UW faculty member all of his professional life. And he's known throughout the state as an expert on woody ornamentals.

Being raised on a farm near Dousman in Waukesha County had an influence on Prof. Hasselkus. "It made me decide I never wanted to be a farmer," he admits. "But another major influence was that absolutely everyone in my family, all grandparents included, was an avid gardener. It was just part of us to dig in the soil and have fun growing things."

Nevertheless, Prof. Hasselkus decided to major in Pharmacy when he



Dr. Edward Hasselkus

attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison. "But then some of my friends pointed out my interest in plants," he explains. "I thought, 'Well, maybe that's what I should do.' So I switched my undergraduate degree to Landscape Architecture.

"In my junior year, I could see that I was more interested in the actual plants," he continues. "And I was a little nervous about sitting at a drawing board the rest of my life. I made the decision then that I was going to go on to graduate school."

He received his BS in 1954 and then served as an officer in the Army, stationed in England for 1½ years. "It was the beginning of a life-long love affair with England," Prof. Hasselkus points out. "I think my trip back this summer was my tenth."

Upon completing his Army duty, he was offered an assistantship at the UW. He received an MS in horticulture in 1958 and a PhD in horticulture and botany in 1962. And he joined the faculty of the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture (the two were joined at the time) in 1961. "It certainly wasn't my life plan to remain at Wisconsin for my entire career," he

admits. "But it just happened that way. And, of course, I don't regret it."

For his 33 years at the UW, Prof. Hasselkus' appointment was 50 percent Extension and 50 percent teaching. "I was one of the relatively few people with a teaching and Extension split," he points out. "Things did get hectic, particularly in the spring. I don't know how many times I drove back to Madison late at night just because I had a class to teach the next morning. And then right after class I had to rush out to the Arboretum to stake out plants because it was the planting season."

But this split also allowed him to have contact with lots of people. "It was a pleasure to work with people, particularly through teaching," he says. "I enjoyed seeing students find their place in the world and the feeling that maybe I got them turned on to horticulture while they were here."

Golf course superintendents who graduated from the UW are familiar with his teaching. "All of the students in the turf program were required to take my courses, so I've gotten to know them all," Prof. Hasselkus says. "Off hand, I can think of two who went on to graduate school in horticulture with me, Andy Otting and David Guthery."

Even though he had a reputation as a tough grader, Monroe wasn't the only one who appreciated having Prof. Hasselkus as a teacher. In 1987 he won the UW-Madison Distinguished Teaching Award. "That was probably the most meaningful of all the awards I received," he points out. He also accepted teaching and advising awards from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, as well as awards from the Student Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Department of Landscape Architecture.

In addition to teaching, Prof. Hasselkus was responsible for starting the student Horticulture Club on campus and served as its advisor for 19 years.

And he was advisor to Pi Alpha Xi, an honorary society, for 10 years.

He keeps in touch with about 250 former students through an annual New Year letter that he has been writing for 19 years. "I tell about what's going on at the campus. And, with the news that they send me, I tell about what they are doing — new positions, who got married, those kinds of things. They won't let me stop. I suppose I'll have to continue doing this in retirement."

In retirement, he'll also continue as curator of the Longenecker Gardens at the UW-Madison Arboretum, a position he has held since 1966. The approximately 50-acre garden was begun in 1935 by Prof. Longenecker. "He happened to be my undergraduate advisor," Prof. Hasselkus points out.

The gardens are used for field evaluation of landscape plants and for teaching. They're also open to the public. "Prof. Longenecker felt strongly that not every visitor is going to want to look carefully at each individual plant," Prof. Hasselkus explains. "Rather than plant things in rows, he designed a pleasing landscape so that the design itself would have an impact on the visitor."

Today, Longenecker Gardens has the most significant lilac collection in the midwest, the most up-to-date collection of ornamental crabapples in the world, the largest collection of trees and shrubs in Wisconsin, and probably the largest number of cultivars of trees and shrubs in the upper midwest, according to Prof. Hasselkus. "It's 'Mecca' to a lot of plant people," he adds.

Although he is well known for his work at Longenecker Gardens, Prof. Hasselkus has plenty of other feathers for his professional hat. "I have been the keeper of records of the Wisconsin Champion Exotic Trees. In other words, I keep track of the largest non-native trees of every kind in the state," he explains.

He introduced two cultivars of serviceberries, Strata and Flambeau, and two cultivars of junipers, Wisconsin and Petite. He also introduced the Whitespire birch. "It is the first white bark birch that tolerates heat stress, which translates into resistance to the bronze birch borer," he explains. "It's grown all over the country now, probably the most commonly planted birch today.

"Ten year ago I started the Wisconsin Woody Plant Society, a group of

'plant nuts,'" he relates. "I organize a meeting every spring and fall. We usually get 80 to 100 people, a mix of advanced amateur and professionals. I have always maintained that people who like plants are nice people!

"They won't let me quit, either, so I'll have to continue organizing those meetings now that I'm retired," he adds. He'll also work with the International Ornamental Crabapple Society, which he helped found, and the American Conifer Society.

Prof. Hasselkus has received several awards for his professional work. "The L.C. Chadwick Award from the American Association of Nurserymen was very meaningful because it was the second one given in the country," he points out. "And the Linnaeus Award from the Chicago Horticultural Society meant a lot, too."

In addition to remaining active with many professional societies during his retirement, Prof. Hasselkus plans to write a book. "It will be a second edition of a book that's out of print, 'Trees and Shrubs for Northern Gardens,' published by the University of Minnesota Press," he reports. "I told them I'd do it after I was retired, so they've been breathing down my neck."

Retirement gives him time to reflect on his 33 years in the horticulture profession. "I started in Extension about the time Dutch elm disease entered Wisconsin," he points out. "In the early years of my career, I spent a lot of time working with municipalities with their street tree programs.

"I emphasized diversity of new plantings and made recommendations of which trees should be used to replace the American elm," he continues. "I think we learned the lesson to not overly rely on a single tree."

Since his early days with Extension, he also promoted serviceberries. "They were almost unknown then," he recalls. "They're a plant with year-round interest, something I've always promoted. The importance of flowers, yes, but also the importance of fruits and fall color and bark interest."

Prof. Hasselkus has worked with crabapples throughout his career and is known as a crabapple expert in the midwest. "The Hopa crabapple was the most popular when I started my career, but it was extremely susceptible to apple scab," he recalls. "I used the theme, 'Kick the Hopa habit,' as a title to talks."

As an Extension specialist, Prof. Hasselkus has had contact with Wisconsin golf course superintendents

through speaking engagements. "And several courses have asked me to help label the trees on the course," he points out.

"A pleasing landscape is one of the most important things there is to a golf course," he believes. "Landscape plants make a golf course special."

As an expert on landscape plants, it's no surprise that Prof. Hasselkus can't drive through a neighborhood without being fully aware of those plants. "It's surprising that I haven't had numerous accidents," he relates. "My wife is always shouting, 'Watch out!' I'm always looking at some wonderful tree. The beautifully shaped specimens really stand out for me."

His love of plants, combined with his love for travel, led to an unusual activity: hosting garden tours. "I hosted five different garden tours to Europe, and one to Australia and New Zealand," he explains. "I haven't done one for several years now because the ones that I wanted to do interfered with my teaching. So I plan to do more now that I'm retired. In fact, I'm planning to host a tour to western Europe next spring during tulip time."

From his numerous plant-related activities, it's obvious that Prof. Hasselkus has more than a professional interest in plants. "My interest in plants is both my vocation and my avoca-



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tion," he admits. "As I've often said, I probably would have done most of what I've done with plants whether or not I got paid."

Genealogy is one hobby that doesn't involve plants — except family trees. It's also the reason he knew that we were related. "My grade school teacher got me started with a class project," he recalls. "I've worked on genealogy all of these years. I expect to spend a lot of winter days at the State Historical Society Library now that I'm retired. I'm working on my wife's genealogy."

His hobbies are augmented by travel. "We never take a trip around the country or to Europe without working a little bit on genealogy," he reports. "And my wife allows no more than one garden visit per day when we're traveling!"

His wife, Betty, is an associate professor and the coordinator of the Occupational Therapy program in the department of Kinesiology (study of movement) at the UW. "She always worked at least part time as an OT," he explains. "Later in life, after the kids were grown, she went back to school and earned her PhD."

The Hasselkuses have two children. Jane is a market analyst with Kodak in Rochester, N.Y. John and his wife live in Germantown, Md., where he just started a high-tech computer company with three other people.

For most of his career at the UW, the Hasselkuses lived in University Heights, six blocks from his office. "I always walked, never had a parking place on the campus for 27 years," he recalls. "But as retirement approached, we decided to move to Nakoma to be closer to the Arboretum. That was about six years ago. We love where we live and expect to spend the rest of our days right in our house on Miami Pass."

Well, maybe he won't spend too many days at home. In case you haven't been keeping track, Prof. Hasselkus has numerous endeavors planned for his retirement: continuing the newsletter for horticulture graduates; serving as curator of Longenecker Gardens; planning meetings for the Wisconsin Woody Plant Society; working with other professional societies; writing a book; hosting garden tours; and spending more time on genealogy.

He must have inherited all of the energy in "our" family! 🌱

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