

# Positive exposure



*Participation in events that benefit your community can provide your landscape company with immeasurable benefits.*

By JOHN B. CALSIN, JR.

**T**he second annual Chester County Flower Show this past spring gave Philadelphia-area landscapers an opportunity to showcase their talents while helping community charities.

"It was great creative outlet," said Robert Schrack about the Chester County event. Schrack is owner of Decked Out Exterior Design of West Chester, Pa. "I wanted to jump on board immediately. It was community oriented. I felt I could help a great organization raise some money, and I would get my creative ideas out to the public."

Schrack learned of the show from a client who is also a board member of Family Service of Chester County (FSCC).

Schrack's company is a full-service landscape company, specializing in custom design and installation of creative gardens. He collaborated on his show exhibit with Chris Zobel of Chester County Oak Works, a post-and-beam structure company.

FSCC is a private, non-profit social service agency. It offers eight specialized supportive and strengthening programs for individuals and families in the county, such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program and Project One: HIV/AIDS Case Management and Counseling.

Jan Hatchard, FSCC's director of development, said the first year, 1996, was a year of "selling her vision" to get the show started. She said the FSCC board "invested in the show" to get it off the ground. This year, now that the show is established, she hoped to raise at least \$25,000.

#### **Trading experiences**

John Keating, Jr., owner of Artscape-Sophisticated Landscapes in Downingtown, Pa., and another major exhibitor said the show is the only advertising his company does. He is not even listed in the telephone directory because his customers come from referrals.

Keating got involved for several reasons, not the least of which was to give something back to his community. Of course, the exposure at the show was welcome. It provided a great opportunity to showcase new work to established clients. And, he said, he got a chance to trade ideas with other people in the green industry.

In the 1996 Show, Keating did not get any new work, so he wasn't expecting much from this year's show. However, it turned out he was wrong.

On the Saturday afternoon of the show, event sponsors scheduled a "Designer

Showcase," complete with a buffet for clients of the major exhibitors. Landscapers and florists took their clients through the show, and then talked business over a light lunch and drinks.

One of the landscapers discovered that if clients were hedging on larger projects, they were more inclined to decide to go with the larger project after seeing an exhibit.

Participants found it was also an excellent way to network and get some new ideas from the educational opportunities provided by groups such as Longwood Gardens, Penn State University's professional gardening program, and the Rodale Institute's Experimental Farm.

The show is a giant, volunteer cooperative effort. It is a partnership between corporate sponsors, major and feature exhibitors, East High School, and hundreds of community volunteers. More than 250 volunteers contributed over 8,000 hours service.

#### **Cooperation, not competition**

Scott Whitfield, president of Whitfield Landscapes, Ltd., Downingtown, specializes in landscape construction, particularly interlocking paver work. He participated in the Show also.

"The reason I did it was because it was an excellent benefit for a local charity. I strongly believe in this," said Whitfield. Of course, he admitted, he also wanted to attract potential customers and meet with peers.

"It brought a lot of the contractors closer together," said Whitfield. The show is not judged, so cooperation rather than competition is stressed.

"It was a good marketing tool for us," said Whitfield, adding that participation puts a company "on a different level" than non-exhibiting companies. □