

LM's 1998:

People of the Year

Although they come from very different backgrounds, each of our 1998 People of the Year share a common character-

istic: a focus on improving the industry around them through dedication and extra effort.

By the LM STAFF

Lawn Care Category

**Lou Wierichs Jr.,
owner/president of Pro-X Systems Inc.,
Appleton, WI.**



People who have worked with Lou Wierichs Jr. at various organizations agree on several things: he's generous with his time, finances and efforts; he's dedicated to achieving the organization's goals; and he believes these efforts should be enjoyable.

Wierichs joined the lawn care industry in 1988. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Wierichs worked in several industries, including banking and printing. His eight years driving a semi-trailer gave him a sense of being on his own. "That was the closest thing to owning a business, without the headaches," he recalls.

In 1987, Wierichs became partners with two others in a Servicemaster lawn care franchise, which won the company's "Fast Start" award for quick growth in 1988. By 1990, the business had grown to include a second franchise in the Green Bay area.

After the Servicemaster purchase of Tru-Green and Chemlawn in 1991, Wierichs and partners established their own lawn care company — Pro-X Systems Inc. It offers lawn care, mowing and some landscape and tree care, as well as aeration and other additions. In 1995, Wierichs bought his partners

out and this fall, added a Christmas Decor franchise.

Jumping right in

Even when his company was new, Wierichs sought out others in the industry. At a trip to PLCAA's annual conference in Las Vegas, he attended a presentation by Bob Andrews, The Greenskeeper, Carmel, IN, on the benefits of belonging to local associations. This made a major impression on him. "I came back and made some calls to the state Department of Ag" about an finding or forming an association.

With other local green industry people, Wierichs helped get the Grounds Management Association of Wisconsin on its feet. "This really got me involved at the state level," he notes. Wierichs became active in the leadership of GMAW, as well as the Wisconsin Landscape Federation, a group coordinating the efforts of different green industry professions. Currently, Wierichs is WLF president.

He saw how critical organized efforts were to the industry. "In our industry, it seemed like there was always a fire pop-

ping up and we were always throwing water on it. I thought we should be united to battle those fires and also to take a more proactive stance in our communities."

Wierichs also became involved at the national level, joining the board of directors of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in 1992, serving as its president in 1994 and stepping in to fill an empty directors' spot, in a term that expires this month. In fact, he proudly notes he joined PLCAA before he had ever treated a lawn.

Two other accomplishments

Wierichs views with pride are his service on the Green Industry Expo board (serving as president in 1996), and his work as president of the PLCAA Foundation, now called the Evergreen Foundation (currently, he is vice president).

Making it enjoyable

Terry Kurth, president of Lawn Care of Wisconsin Inc. and Badgerland Irrigation, Middleton, WI, has crossed paths often

Lou Wierichs Jr. career highlights

1987: Becomes partner in a Servicemaster lawn care franchise in Appleton, Wis.

1989: Grounds Management Association of Wisconsin representative to the Wisconsin Landscape Federation — a post held continuously since then.

1991: Establishes Pro-X Systems Inc.

1991-95: Director of the Professional

Grounds Care Category

George M. Gaumer,

national sales and operations manager, Commercial Services, The Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio



Some of George Gaumer's earliest memories involve the green industry — he remembers playing in the yard of his father's landscape business in Warren, Ohio. In fact, the family lived on site. This early involvement extended during family vacations, when the Gaumers took time to attend annual conferences of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

with Wierichs. He says Wierichs is "a consensus builder. He's looking for the things that benefit everyone in an organization."

According to Kurth, Wierichs tries to pay back an industry that has been good to him by "paying forward." And he does it in true Wierichs style, Kurth says: "Lou looks out for the best interests of the industry, but makes sure to build relationships and friendships along the way. He thoroughly enjoys people and wants to spread the fun through an organization that is getting things done." □

Lawn Care Association of America.

1991-96: Board of Directors, Green Industry Expo

1994: President of PLCAA

1995-97: President of PLCAA Foundation

1996: President of Green Industry Expo

1997-98: Director of PLCAA

1997-99: President of Wisconsin Landscape Federation

1998: Vice President of Evergreen Foundation

The business and management side of the green industry always fascinated Gaumer. "I noticed that a lot of people get into the field because they love horticulture and are good at working with plants, but some people are just not good with business. That's the side that always intrigued me," he notes.

After graduating with a B.S. in Business Administration (Marketing) from The Ohio State University, he joined a residential tree care firm in Columbus, Ohio. One of his first steps on the job was to become a member of ISA, where he held various positions, including Director of the Ohio chapter. He also became an ISA-certified arborist.

In supportive company

Gaumer joined The Davey Tree Expert Co. in 1977. With Davey's support, he continued his involvement with ISA and became a charter member of the Northeast Ohio Professional Grounds Management Society branch when it was started in the early 1980s. The experience of helping to develop the PGMS branch eventually led to activities at the national level, and by 1992, he became a PGMS director at large for a three-year term.

Coincidentally, changes in the industry and in Davey's business direction made this connection more valuable for Gaumer. "I started out going to some of the national meetings as a way to get business from in-house grounds managers," he notes. "But along the way, I got involved more with the organization at the same time Davey

diversified into grounds maintenance work. Soon the meetings became educational opportunities (for us)."

Finding consensus

Jeff Bourne, director of operations and education with Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), experienced Gaumer's team-building approach: "The phrase 'consummate professional' comes to mind because although he approaches things in a very businesslike fashion, it's well balanced with the human side, which creates an atmosphere of comfort that is productive."

David Luse, director of corporate development at LandCare USA, Houston, and founder of Arteka Corp., agrees: "George's leadership style is calm consensus building. He's a true leader and showed it by helping to pull the GIE partnership together." □

George M. Gaumer career highlights

1975: Joins Ohio Tree Surgery Co., Columbus, Ohio

1977: Joins ISA and becomes involved with industry organizations. Is appointed to Board of Governors and committee chair positions.

1977: Joins The Davey Tree Expert Co. as assistant advertising manager

1986: Becomes charter member of the Northeast Ohio Chapter, Professional Grounds Management Society.

1992-94: Board of Directors, Green Industry Expo

1994: President of Green Industry Expo

1996-98: PGMS Director at Large

1996-98: Board of Directors, Green Industry Expo