

National Seed Company Selected for 2010 ILCA Distinguished Service Award

By Patrice Peltier

Tom Breier taught

his sons Tim, Dan and Mark that in business and in life it's important to give more than you receive. With a philosophy like that, it's not surprising that their family-owned business, National Seed Company, earned ILCA's Distinguished Service Award.

Tom, who's been in the industry since 1980, started National Seed in 1991, joining ILCA right away. Each year since then, the company, which distributes proprietary grass seed, chemicals, fertilizers, ice melt and turf maintenance products, has been an exhibitor at Mid-Am and at Summer Field Day.

"They've been sponsors, exhibitors, always there to help out," says ILCA Past President Tyler Smith. "Mark's offered a lot of suggestions over the years on how to improve those shows. It's nice to have that kind of feedback from a vendor," he adds.

"The Breier family understands the landscape market and contractors," says ILCA Executive Director Scott Grams. "They understand how to communicate with contractors and appreciate the constraints of the profession. National Seed excels because it leverages relationships that are so difficult to develop but seem to be second nature to them."

Smith says he was impressed by Mark Breier's knowledge, his persistence and his friendly manner. Breier called on Smith for five years before Smith ever bought a thing. "He'd stop by, give me information on new products and techniques. He understood I had a good relationship with my existing supplier, but he'd always say, 'If you ever need something they can't supply, I want you to know we're here,'" Smith recalls.

Smith got to thinking about how many contacts Breier has, coupled with his work ethic and his pleasant persistence. He thought Breier would be a great asset to ILCA's Membership Committee and asked him to consider supporting the association in that way. Breier was intrigued. He joined the



committee, and six months later, he was named the chair.

National Seed Company's participation in a number of industry organizations gives Breier a big-picture perspective on ILCA. Many industry organizations are struggling due to the economy these days, he says. "ILCA is the one out of all of them that is being proactive. They're looking at what they're doing right, and — it's refreshing — looking into the mirror to see what they're doing wrong," Breier notes.

Breier thinks membership is an especially important committee in this economic environment. With so many companies cutting costs, association membership can be a likely place to cut. "We want to make sure ILCA membership is at the top of the list of items to keep," he says. "We want to be sure we're bringing the right value to the membership."

Already, under Breier's leadership, the newly re-energized Membership Committee is preparing the most extensive survey of ILCA members in many years.

"Mark has spearheaded the development of a comprehensive membership survey that will gather demographic and event and initiative-specific information from the members," explains Grams. "The results of this survey will dictate strategic planning for years to come."

"We need to find out whether members' needs are being met and what their priorities are for programs," Breier says.

The committee is also exploring an affinity program to offer special discounts to ILCA members, as well as more seminars to address day-to-day

issues such as health insurance and licensing. Broadening program topics to include subjects like how to establish and/or grow the snow removal part of members' businesses, as well as considering how to make the location of programs more convenient for more members are other topics on the table, according to Breier.

Since Breier became chair of the Membership Committee, ILCA has added more than 200 new members, Grams notes. This includes the aggressive 50 for 50 Campaign that nearly doubled its goal, signing up 97 new members.

In keeping with his family's philosophy, Breier has identified ILCA's Membership Committee as an area where he can give back. "It's our place to help strengthen ILCA," he says. "It's a worthy organization."

In addition to serving on committees and exhibiting at Mid-Am and Summer Field Day, National Seed has supported ILCA in other ways, Grams points out. For instance, last September, National Seed sponsored a keynote speaker for the second Lawn Care Education Day.

"This speaker was a nationally-renowned expert on drought control who blew away the 160-person audience," Grams reports.

The Breier family philosophy isn't limited to giving back to the industry. They are also involved with several charitable organizations, including Southwest Sertoma, The Walter & Connie Payton Foundation, and the Starlight Children's Foundation, which helps to improve the quality of life for children with chronic and life-threatening illnesses. "We feel extremely blessed for everything we have and are just trying to do our part to help those who are less fortunate," Breier explains.

National Seed is proud to be selected for the Distinguished Service Award, Breier says. "We didn't do it to be recognized," he notes. "But it's certainly a feather in your cap when you are." 