



Interiorscape Hall of Fame



Tom Acklin

2009 Allied Trade Professional



Like all young boys, Tom Acklin wanted to grow up to be one of his childhood heroes, either a Baseball Player, or, a Mouseketeer. That's right. Back in the day of black and white television, Tom would watch the Mickey Mouse Club after school, totally enraptured with all things Disney. Little did he know that in 1980, he'd be on a plane to Hong Kong along with Disney designers to help formulate the products they needed for the first Epcot Center in Florida.

Tom began his career path a few years earlier as a Monsanto dealer for their line of artificial grass for and putting greens and exterior applications. This led him to working with the then owner of Autograph Foliages and shortly thereafter he bought the company. But back to the Epcot project. Back then artificial foliage was still at its beginnings. For Epcot Center, Disney needed special artificial material. Not only did it have to look and feel real, it also needed to be fire retarded, a process that did not then exist. Tom became an integral part of the Disney team and helped create the innovative products to fill the bill. Today it is hard to imagine a world without these products and Tom was there at the start. Over the years, Tom has strived to incorporate the Disney adherence to quality and innovation throughout Autograph.

After this auspicious start, Autograph Foliages continued to grow. Under Tom's direction, the company worked extensively with interiorscapers. By carefully listening to his customers, Tom developed numerous lines of artificial for projects all over the world, large and small. From individual plants in a small office, to large scale trees and palms, to grasses that look and feel real, to thatch product for uses inside and out, and as 'scapers moved into holiday décor, extensive lines of holiday material. Autograph continued to bring out new products for designers and interiorscapers' use. Over the past 30 years this has meant over 60 trips to Asia taking the needs of his clients to the factories. This back and forth between a sketch or description, through the production capabilities in another country, dealing with differences in language, materials, and monetary exchanges, has been challenging to say the least. Remember, this all started some 30 years ago before paths were more fixed. Tom was one of those early trailblazers often creating new methods and designs for the new products that were in such demand. The company continued to grow.

Soon, Autograph products could be seen all over the world. The larger projects, shopping malls, hospitality venues, amusement parks, and motion picture set designs demanded

innovation and creative problem solving. Often it is the hidden details that hold potential for failure or success. Installation and shipping, can provide huge challenges. The Autograph team has met these challenges time and time again, often coming up with new solutions that have become standard operating procedure.

Speaking of Team Autograph, as the business grew, so did Tom's family. Tom and his wife Peggy have six children and, today all six are part of Autograph. Carrie, Katie, Holly, Laura, Jamie and Tommy work in Sales, Marketing, web design, and inventory control. It truly is a family endeavor.

Most of us can remember the first time we met Tom. It may have been at an ALCA or AFIA tradeshow as Tom and Autograph were staunch supporters of these and other industry associations. More recently, Tom became a strong supporter of PIA. He remembers how it came about. Some years ago, as Tom would be exhibiting at ALCA or AFIA shows, one of PIA's most ardent members, Vicky Cate, would approach Tom and try to cajole him into exhibiting at Calscape. After a couple of years of friendly pressure, Tom agreed to do so. He thinks that this is one of the best decisions he has ever made.

The Hall of Fame has always had a allied trade category, but it takes far more than just selling stuff to our members. To be singled out for Hall of Fame inclusion, it means that the recipient of the award has to be active, a strong supporter of our associations and to have brought innovative products to our industry. Tom Acklin has done all of these and we are fortunate to have had his strong involvement. Along with these attributes, it also helps if the recipient is just a nice guy. If you were to ask those of us who know Tom the most heard comment would be, "Tom? He's a really *nice* guy". Not a bad description after being in business for over 30 years.

And so we welcome Tom Acklin as the 2009 Interior Plantscape Hall of Fame Allied Trade Professional.

