



Interiorscape Hall of Fame



Greg Eberly

2001 Plantscaping Professional

Greg was one of the early pioneers in the industry in southern California and did his part to teach clients just what plantscapers were and did. Greg's plantscaping career began in a small, lean-to type shade house in the heart of downtown Long Beach, California. In those days all one had to do was grab a watering can and scissors and proclaim oneself a 'plantscaper'. At that time, a potential client's most common response was, "a what?" He opened the doors to his company, Designer Greens, in 1980 with two clients referred to him by a local florist who didn't want to be bothered with watering someone else's plants. "The name was a play on Gloria Vanderbilt's designer jeans, a connection no one remembers 20 years later," Greg says. Like many in the fledgling industry at the time, Greg had an interest in but little knowledge of interior plants. "I always had a plant or two around the house and found great joy in keeping them alive for more than a month or two, he said."

Greg was born in Toledo, Ohio, and grew up in nearby Fremont. His father, an accountant for Whirlpool Corp, was transferred to St. Joseph, Michigan when Greg was 16. He graduated from high school in 1969 and received what he refers to as his 'life-preparing' bachelor's degree in multidisciplinary social science from Michigan State University in 1973. While a student, Greg fell into a news-writing job with the MSU news bureau and transformed that experience into an early successful career in government public relations.

His first exposure to agriculture came with a job as a special assistant to the national 4-H editor at the US Department of Agriculture's headquarters in Washington, DC. He then moved over to the Agricultural Marketing Service of USDA and spent three years reporting on the government's very controversial federal marketing order program that helped control the flow of agricultural products to market. "I used to schedule month-long trips to California's central valley in the summer," Greg says, "to produce feature stories, publications and multi-media presentations right from the farm. Of course, escaping Washington summers and spending weekends on the California coast had nothing to do with my interest," he says, tongue-in-cheek.

Longing to make a permanent move to the Golden State, Greg left government service to accept a technical writing position with Security Pacific Bank at the bank's headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. He and three others were responsible for writing and updating the bank's credit and operations manuals.

While in that job, Greg observed a couple friends who left the corporate banking world to start a 'plant maintenance company' in the San Fernando Valley. "I watched them make mistakes, I asked a lot of questions and learned the tricks of the trade from them, such as

they were in the late '70s. After a year or so of watching from the sidelines, the opportunity to try my hand at interiorscaping was presented by my florist friend in Belmont Shore.

Things evolved from there, "The business grew slowly until we got involved with Jack-In-The-Box. We landed the account for our first district with 'Jack' in 1981 and provided service to nearly 200 restaurants throughout L.A. and Orange counties." The maintenance charge was a 'lofty' \$25 per month per restaurant in the mid-1980s.

Greg attended the first meeting of the Professional Interior Plantscape Association (PIPA) at the old Keeline-Wilcox facility in Irvine with some 200 other interiorscapers. Stunned that there were so many others doing interiorscaping, PIPA became a resource and a place where he could talk plants with others having the same interest in making interiorscaping a career.

Greg volunteered his time and talent to become the editor of PIPA NEWS. Then he served in various terms as PIPA's treasurer, vice-president and president. It was during his tenure as PIPA president that he met other plantscapers and UC representatives at the Turf and Landscape Institute. From luncheon discussions during that seminar, the notion of CalScape Expo and CIPA was born. The rest is history.

Greg served as co-chair of the first CalScape Expo in 1990, a time when the responsibility for planning, executing and staffing the entire event rested on the chair and his board. When CIPA was founded from the merger of California's regional associations, he was elected first State Chair of CIPA, a position he held for two years. He subsequently chaired the Awards Program for two years Greg received the Gold Leaf Award in 1994, presented annually to CIPA's most outstanding member.

Greg relocated Designer Greens to Palm Desert in 1990. It was very much like starting all over again. Although Greg is not a fan of the desert summers, the area has been extremely profitable.

Greg ... and Designer Greens ... have won numerous local and national awards for interiorscaping projects. He subscribes to the philosophy that bigger isn't necessarily better and has worked on creating and maintaining a company that remains very much personal and hands-on. "I still do a day of maintenance myself," Greg says, "it keeps me humble and, more importantly, allows me to continue to experiment and learn."

