

A Story about Valley Crest Tree Company



Recently, landscape industry pioneer Environmental Industries, Inc. changed its name to ValleyCrest Companies. The names of four of the ValleyCrest Companies business units were aligned with that of the parent company. Valley Crest Tree Company retained its name and identity. With the rebranding now in place, LCN thought it would be fun for readers to learn a little bit more about one of the industry's leading tree companies.

When Stuart Sperber entered the Army in 1956, he knew he would be serving his country, but he had no idea that he would be pursuing the family trade at the same time.

While stationed at Camp Hanford located in Richland, Wash., Sperber, a Private First Class (PFC), was in charge of landscaping the entire base. He was put on TDY (Extended Temporary Duty) and for all but a couple of months landscaped the base. He beat out sergeants and other officers for the job because of his experience in the Green Industry.

Camp Hanford was a plutonium production plant, where a Nike battalion was stationed. In the 1950s, Nike guided missile systems replaced the anti-aircraft artillery guns of the 1940s. Sperber was a part of this battalion before he landed his landscaping assignment.

“They were looking for someone with landscape and horticultural experience,” said Sperber who for two years before his stint in the Army studied Ornamental Horticulture at California Polytechnic University, Pomona. “I was just a PFC and I beat out sergeants and all other ranks for the job.”

Branching Out

You could say that a passion for the Green Industry is in his roots. In the late 1940s Sperber’s father, Louis and older brother Burton started

ValleyCrest Landscape Nurseries. What was a small neighborhood landscape retail nursery in North Hollywood, began to grow as Southern California’s post World War II population began to swell.

The company grew as schools and highways were being built, and the landscape work they did was in great demand. The demand for trees grew as well. Most wholesale nurseries at the time were growing only one-gallon and five-gallon trees and shrubs. But nobody was selling specimen trees.

Jumping at the opportunity to branch out, the Sperber’s started Valley Crest Tree Company on three acres in Sepulveda, Calif.

It was 1960. Kennedy and Nixon were battling for the White House, the suburbs and of the greater Los Angeles area were developing, and nowhere could one find quality specimen trees to landscape with. So as the old saying goes, if life gives you lemons, make lemonade . . . or a lemon tree. “We were doing landscaping at the time and you couldn’t buy 15-gallon or 24-inch box trees,”



Stuart Sperber (far right) stands with members from LA Beautiful, during a tree planting in the 1960s. LA Beautiful is a group that works to promote the natural environment. Sperber as he looks today (below).

Sperber said. “You could get one-gallon and five-gallon, but there were very few if any place you could buy trees so we felt a tree nursery would be the right thing to have so that Landscape Contractors would have material.”

What has resulted is a company that operates facilities in Northern and Southern Calif. that expand over 600 acres and has become the largest producer of containerized specimen trees in the West. While the Tree Company was started to grow trees for ValleyCrest landscape jobs, today more than 90 percent of VCT’s production is purchased by outside companies. According to Sperber, over the course of the company’s history, they’ve sold more than 10 million plants.

Valley Crest Tree Company currently employs 433 permanent, full-time employees.

Not only does the company grow trees, it moves them as well. They stock 15-gallon through 72-inch box trees and shrubs; mature one-of-a-kind specimen trees; provide tree relocation, storage, installation and preservation services.

“There was a need for trees with all the new





ValleyCrest Landscape Nurseries had always moved trees, so when the company split to create Valley Crest Tree Company, their reputation as reliable tree re-locators came with them. The largest transplanting job the company ever participated in was moving 1,500 trees at Lake Sherwood, 35 miles from Los Angeles.

development going on and nobody filling it,” Sperber said. “We had been doing tree moving all along under ValleyCrest Landscape Nurseries, but we split the companies to have a different profit center.”

Sperber said that the biggest project that the company has ever worked on was Lake Sherwood. The lake, adjacent to Thousand Oaks, Calif. and about 35 miles from Los Angeles, it sits on 1,900 acres of prime real estate, that includes a Jack Nicklaus designed golf course that annually holds a charity golf tournament hosted by Tiger Woods. Sperber said that his company transplanted approximately 1,500 trees on the site.

“We were on the job, including the maintenance period, some four years moving over 1,500 oaks and other less easily acclimated natives such as Manzanita,” he said. “To date, we are aware of only two units having failed. The sheer magnitude of the project was staggering.”

Sperber added that the property owners actually resculpted the topography of the region to create the most accommodating environment for this development.

“Coupled with the volume of trees to be transplanted was the constant pressure of time,” he said. “Frequently we were moving trees just hours ahead of the grading equipment coming in to level an entire hillside. Timing and precision of movement were critical to our safety and success.”



The original three acre lot where the Tree Company began in Sepulveda, Calif. Today the company operates facilities in Northern and Southern Calif. that expand over 600 acres.

The Family Tree

While Sperber took the reins of the Tree Company and Burton looked over the Landscape Company, there was no sibling rivalry to see which company could do better. It was then as it is today, a team effort with the family to develop the business and the people they worked with.

"Everything has always been done as a family and as a team," Sperber said.

As with any business there are good times and not-so-good times, but with a



good support base, the best companies always rise to the top. Sperber credits the success of all the ValleyCrest companies to dynamic employees who are willing to be challenged and help the company grow.

"By allowing people to grow, it's helped us grow our business," he said. "The challenge is growing good quality people to continue to grow your business. Getting them to understand as much as you do and allowing them to do it is key."


While people have been Sperber's biggest challenge in business, they've also been his biggest success.

"People are a big challenge," he said. "Getting people to spread their wings so to speak and grow with us as an organization is a challenge. Seeing people grow and grow along with our business has been the biggest success."

Sperber started with his dad and brother just pulling weeds and watering plants. From there he learned how to box and move trees. Today Sperber is Vice Chairman of the Board, VCC and CEO and co-founder of Valley Crest Tree Co.

"I've enjoyed my 45 years in the business," he said. "Whether it's growing a tree or transplanting a tree, I enjoy the results of what we've done."

"Although it's a job, you should enjoy what you are doing."

As his company and people continue to grow, Sperber will continue to enjoy his job, just as if he was on TDY. 

Nearly 90 percent of Valley Crest Tree Company's production is purchased by outside companies. According to Sperber, the company has sold more than 10 million plants over the course of its history.

