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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2011

Whether you consider yourself a novice or expert gardener, chances are pretty good that you've heard about, seen or bought a "blue pot" plant—an Endless Summer Hydrangea. But you probably don't know much about the extremely humble yet forward-thinking Gordon Bailey, Jr., whose marketing strategy single-handedly brought about the resurgence of that old favorite, the hydrangea.

Gordie Bailey is chairman of the board of Bailey Nurseries, one of the largest wholesale nurseries in the United States. Four generations of the Bailey family have had a hand in the business. Based in Newport, Minn. (outside Minneapolis and St. Paul), they also run growing operations in Oregon, Washington, Illinois and Iowa. During their peak season, Bailey Nurseries employs more than 1,500 people.

These days Gordie leaves the day-to-day operations of Bailey to the management team headed by his niece and company president Terri McEnaney. Gordie still works three days a week. He and his brother Rod are still involved in all strategic and major capital-investment decisions. If Gordie stays away from the office too long, Terri says, his mentoring is truly missed.

New plants serve as one key to Bailey's success. Their introductions fall under three brands: Easy Elegance Roses, First Editions and the Endless Summer Collection of Hydrangeas. Gordie says when they were introducing the Original Endless Summer, they took what they learned from other branding programs and developed a two-pronged marketing approach to both the consumer and the trade. Never before had there been such a successful marketing campaign; garden writers and consumers drove retailers and landscapers to ask the growers to produce this plant en masse.

Gordie, generally a man of few words, prefers to lead by his actions even beyond the company boardroom.

When a piece of the family farm was sold to a developer, he stipulated that a percentage of the houses in the new community go to Habitat for Humanity, ensuring homes for families from all walks of life. The project also needed large open spaces, an arboretum and neighborhood gardens. The Bailey's Arbor development now includes more than 48 Habitat families.


This past June, Gordie celebrated his 75th birthday by bicycling 75 miles. He caught the biking bug in his mid-60s and soon became interested in doing longer trips, but he wanted to give them meaning by riding for a cause. He decided on the Horticultural Research

Institute, the nursery industry's major research-funding source and a respected research publisher. HRI aims to increase the

quality of ornamental plants, improve the productivity and profitability of the nursery and landscape industry and protect and enhance the environment. Gordie's fundraiser, dubbed Tour de Hort, blossomed into a three-leg, coast-to-coast adventure in which he biked 4,500 miles and raised over 1.25 million dollars!

When asked for his proudest accomplishment, Gordie says it is presiding over the company during its most

successful growth period and building it to a point where it could support that growth. He adds that Bailey is first and foremost a "people" business—serving their customers and treating their employees fairly is part of continuing their tradition of integrity.

At a recent management meeting, the facilitator asked the 20-some employees in attendance to state their name and how long they'd been with the company. The answers somewhat stunned him. The newest employee had been with Bailey Nurseries for seven years. Most boasted a 15- to 25-year run. That speaks volumes not only about the company, but the man behind it and the family that bears its name. 

# Gordon Bailey, Jr. Nursery- man

by MARIA ZAMPINI ~ photograph by MICHELLE MEYER

