

Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery receives WGIF Distinguished Service Award

John and Ginger Ahl and Cal and Arlene Frelk, owners of Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery in Merrillan, were honored by the Wisconsin Green Industry Federation (WGIF) with the Distinguished Service Award. Northern Christmas Trees and Nursery received the association's highest honor during the Annual Convention Awards Banquet held in conjunction with Mid-Am in Chicago, Jan. 18. The WGIF honored the Ahls and Frelks for years of active membership in the Federation and several of its member associations.

WGIF President Gilbert Yerke presented the Ahls and the Frelks with the Distinguished Service Award. Yerke shared the couples' business achievements and active participation in WGIF with the crowd of over 100.

Each year the Wisconsin Green Industry Federation selects an individual for his or her years of active membership and extensive involvement. This year a group of people and their company were deserving of the award for their diligent efforts in promoting the industry and discussing the issues with elected officials in Washington, D.C.

John and Ginger Ahl and Cal and Arlene Frelk have been tireless advocates for sensible immigration reform. Over the past several years, the couples have made trips to Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress on behalf of the Green industry. They have pointed out that the current system for the H2-A guest worker program is cumbersome, expensive and holds pitfalls for businesses that wish to use the program. The couples are firm supporters of the Ag Jobs bill, which provides for comprehensive immigration reform.

The Ahls and Frelks have energized others through their involvement in American Nursery and Landscape Association, Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association, Wisconsin Green Industry Federation and Wisconsin Nursery Association, along with groups such as the National Christmas Tree Association and American Agri-Women. Beyond immigration, their contributions have been notable in other Green industry battles including the quest to have Christmas tree production recognized as an agricultural pursuit under U.S. labor laws.

John Ahl served on the WNA Board from 1986 through the 90's, holding each officer position during that time. He served as WNA president in 1994 and 1995. John also served as chair of the Legislative Committee. Ahl is the current Wisconsin director of the National Christmas Tree Producers Association and is a long-standing member and past officer of the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association.

Cal Frelk was president of the National Christmas Tree Producers Association in 1979 and 1980 and served as a director for many years. He was active on many committees such as Tax and Legislation, Audit, Public Relations and Membership. Cal served as president of the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association from 1971 to 1973 and served on the Wisconsin Board of Directors from 1968 to 1988.

"The Frelks and Ahls exemplify the values of our most committed association leaders and members," said WGIF President Gilbert Yerke. "Their efforts have reflected contributions to the industry that transcend self-interest, and it is a privilege to know them and to work side by side."

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