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Citrus Roots – Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation

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The views of the writer may not be the same as this foundation.

The Scheu family

Striving to make our world better, from an assault on frost to philanthropy

Richard Barker and Kim Randall

At the turn of the century, Willis Charles Scheu resided in the town of Grand Junction, Colorado. Local peach crops regularly incurred severe damage during late spring frosts, and these events eventually planted the seed of the idea that today has grown into a multi-generational and multi-faceted family business.

W.C. Scheu invented an oil burning heater that was successful at protecting the tender buds of the deciduous peach trees, and it wasn't long before citrus growers in Southern California got wind of this new device.

Bringing the "smudge pot" to California

They invited him to bring his invention west. After seeing the obvious need in the citrus groves and understanding the potential for growth, Scheu settled in Upland, California, where many of his descendants still live today.

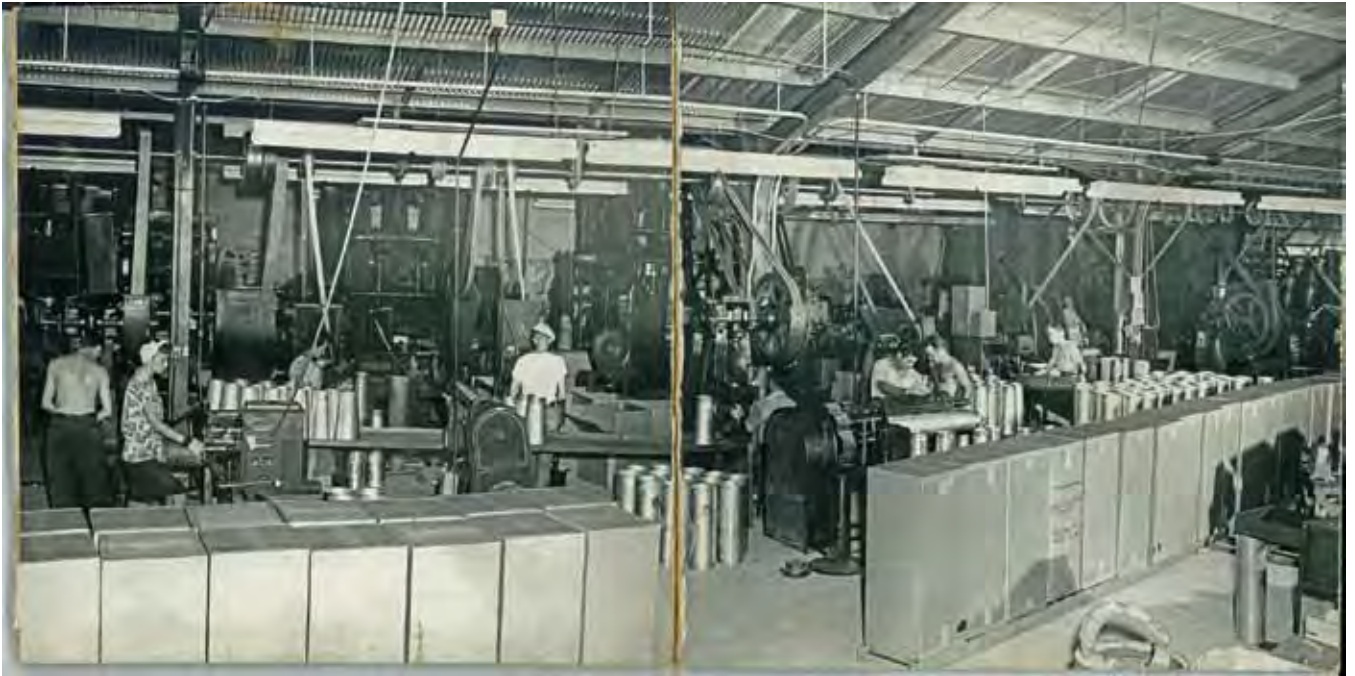
Manufacturing facilities were scarce in the region when Scheu relocated his operation on the West Coast. He contracted out the production of the orchard heaters to American Can Co. in Toledo, Ohio. The heaters were then shipped to an old fruit packinghouse in Upland which Scheu had converted to a warehouse and office. This building would serve as company headquarters for close to a century. It was from this structure that the heaters were distributed to the growers.

While many competitors came and went, Scheu not only survived but thrived. This was due largely in part to the continual innovation and evolution of the Scheu product line.

While the original heaters were designed to intentionally generate smoke -- with the belief that a radiant "blanket" would be created and trap the heat -- this theory was eventually disproven. The name "smudge pot" came from the smoke the heaters produced, and the term stuck even after new designs reduced the smoky output.

Return stack heater becomes industry standard

Focusing on heat generation, the inventor's son, Willis Leland, helped develop the return stack heater in conjunction with the University of California in the early 1940s. This



Stack line for salamander industrial heaters being packaged.



Orchard Co-Op oil supply, 19th & Euclid, smoke in the background from smudging.



One example of many industrial uses of salamander or Hy-Lo.



Equipment from American Can Co. being lowered by crane into the original Upland manufacturing facility.

model reduced emissions by recirculating the products of combustion resulting in a cleaner, more efficient heater. This model would become the industry standard.

When local ordinances were enacted to minimize pollution, growers were required to transition their equipment to a cleaner burning model. In order to facilitate the growers' needs and ease the burden of transition, Scheu Products Company extended credit to them for over four years.

Soon after, it was decided that the continued growth of the company would benefit from in-house manufacturing. Thus, in 1948 Scheu Products Company purchased the manufacturing equipment from American Can Co. The machinery was brought to Upland by rail, lowered into the buildings by crane, and Scheu Products became centralized and streamlined. This transition came just as other markets were opening up for the company.

W.L. Scheu continued to innovate and was responsible for developing a modified version of the orchard heater when he found that they were being used in the construction trades and other non-agricultural environments.

Commonly referred to as a "salamander" (due to the tendency of the heater's body to change colors when hot),

Scheu's version, trademarked as the Hy-Lo, grew quickly in popularity and soon represented almost half the total volume of the company. This versatile heater found markets not only in the U.S. but internationally as well.

During the 1970s, the sons of W.L. Scheu, Allyn and Leland, continued to expand the industrial offerings. The third generation entrepreneurs added a line of gas-fired forced air heaters. These extremely popular heaters were eventually mass marketed through home improvement outlets which included Home Depot, Lowes, Ace Hardware, Grainger's and the like.

After seeing the obvious need in the citrus groves and understanding the potential for growth, Scheu settled in Upland, California, where many of his descendants still live today.

Wind machines were a natural next step

As frost protection evolved, so did the company.

In the late 1970s, wind machines were becoming more prominent as sole sources of protection as well as being used in conjunction with heaters. This trend was not lost on Allyn Scheu, who saw an entrance into that segment of the industry as a natural next step.

A small company in Yakima, Washington, clearly proved to have superior quality and design, and the Scheu companies embarked on yet another phase with their new partners, Orchard Rite Ltd., Inc.



Hy-Lo demonstration, La Verne, California, 1936.





WC Scheu experimenting with original heaters in Grand Junction, Colorado.



Typical smudging night, trying to keep warm with a pot on both sides in anticipation of the call to begin firing.



WC Scheu home.



In-field conversion to return stack.



Scheu heaters at Presidential Inauguration.



Allyn and Leland Scheu with old and new heaters, 1981.



Allyn and Leland during their early transplanting attempts in the California desert.

Sales of the wind machines were initially limited to the Pacific Northwest but soon expanded south by the 1980s with a service center opening in Fresno, California. This expanded their reach to include all of the West Coast and several states east. In addition, a line of nut harvest shakers was added to the product line, further diversifying their offering.

Today, under the careful guidance of founding partner Darryl Hill and General Manager Doug Riddle, this 100% American-made product has captured a significant market share not only domestically but internationally as well.

Providing satellite technology

Though he began as a software consultant with the company in 1985, Riddle came aboard full time nine years later with his background in computer science. Coupled with Hill's engineering background, the two have created OR-SAT™, the company's satellite technology program which allows growers to operate their wind machines from anywhere in the world that has internet access. This communication network and support service uses custom designed hardware and software which provides real-time information on weather, wind machines and fuel tanks.

According to Riddle, the company is technologically savvy from top to bottom. They've recently brought online their third robotic welder for fabrication work and have added a

line of towable tilt wind machines that are just now being introduced to the market. Their tech savvy also extends to visual media, with professionally produced videos accessed through YouTube demonstrating their latest products.

Riddle states that by making the most of these strengths, Orchard Rite has managed to position itself as the leader in customer support. The organization has a worldwide network of factory-trained dealers and service professionals. Because of this coverage, over 70% of the wind machines in use throughout the world today are made by Orchard Rite, Riddle says.

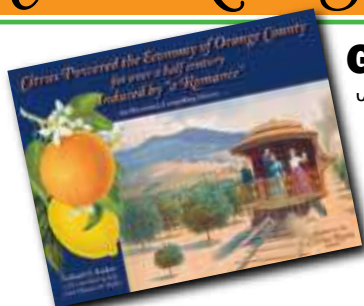
Both Hill and Riddle grew up in the Yakima area, and as Riddle puts it, "We're both just a couple of old farm boys." While Hill's family was successful in construction, Riddle was raised farming deciduous fruits. His experience on the frontlines has been invaluable. These "farm boys" are now leading the way in cutting edge technology for the entire industry and have positioned Orchard Rite as the benchmark.

Even as they push the boundaries of technology today, Allyn remembers when the operations he and his brother were involved with were a bit less sophisticated.

The Scheu family as citrus growers

Both sets of Allyn's and Leland's grandparents raised oranges and lemons in Ontario, Upland and Terra Bella, and

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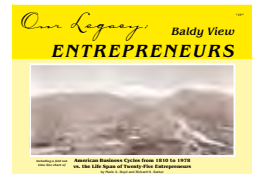
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Keeping citrus heritage alive in the minds of those living in California through publications, educational exhibits and artistic works

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the brothers became the third generation of growers, eventually expanding into the Imperial Valley.

They acquired undeveloped desert land with the hopes they could transform the barren acreage into viable groves. They soon found out what worked in Upland wasn't necessarily going to work in the sand of the California desert. "To say the least, we were a bit naïve," admits Allyn.

The first of many challenges was solving the irrigation problem. Furrow and flooding were out of the question due to the light soil. Drip, drip filtration and micro sprinklers were nonexistent or in their infancy. The decision was made to use a solid set of low level sprinklers, but the brothers' problems continued.

The water source coming from the open, unlined canal carried minute, abrasive materials which caused the sprinklers to self-destruct. "This failure led us to what was supposedly a revolutionary sprinkler tested in the deserts of Israel. The results were worse than our first irrigation attempts," remembers Allyn.

Meeting desert challenges with innovation

The irrigation quandary and several other factors, including the desert's insistence on reclaiming itself, resulted in the brothers constantly having to innovate.

With little industry experience to draw on in the harsh desert environment, brothers Leland and Allyn became pioneers. Carrying on their family history of strategic thinking, they discovered that the light, sandy soil lent itself well to transplanting, a practice observed by Allyn on a frost protec-

tion research trip to the University of Florida.

The brothers eagerly double-planted the acreage, then transplanted the trees during the sixth or seventh year in adjacent fields. The trees suffered a temporary setback but soon recovered and equaled the vigor of the permanent trees in short order.

"We thought we were pretty smart until the morning we arrived to find that the desert winds had blown over half of the trees we'd just transplanted," Allyn says. When asked if he would take on the desert again, he replies, "If I was young, not too bright, and full of youthful optimism, then I probably would." Looking at the acreage today, there is no discernible evidence that half the trees have been transplanted.

Mark McBroom, a native of the Imperial Valley, joined the Scheus in the early 90s and to a great degree is responsible for the expansion over the last two decades. Under his management, the three Scheu properties of Desert Delite, Rancho Dos Hermanos and Scheu Citrus continue to flourish.

Even with the extensive knowledge McBroom has gained under the trying conditions in the Imperial Valley, innovation is still key. Becoming certified organic on one of the ranches has been a priority for McBroom, and he hopes this will open new avenues through which to move product.

Branching out into other fields

Concurrent with their success in varying segments of the citrus industry, the family has branched out into other fields. The 1970s saw their local area transitioning from ag-

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ricultural to residential use. Suburban sprawl prompted the acquisition of vacant land which once held citrus groves. This land was then converted into commercial real estate, which the Scheus manage themselves.

Today, the heart of their organization is still located in downtown Upland, only blocks from the original warehouse. Now occupying the historic Walker-Eisen building, which formerly housed City Hall and the Police Department, Scheu Management Corporation is headquarters to both Allyn and his eldest son Craig as well as to Leland and his two daughters, Allyson and Nevin. They are supported by a staff with an average tenure of over 20 years.

Simi Valley and Westlake area commercial developments are headed by Allyn's son Mark with help from wife Dianna. Allyn's daughter Kristen is busy raising her four children she and husband Eric adopted in Latin America, and Allyn's son Curtis is stationed at R & D Fasteners, another Scheu operation.

Being a family with an agricultural background naturally made it an easy choice for Allyn to acquire an Idaho cattle ranch to add to the family endeavors. His son Mark oversees this operation as well with help from local managers, the Teichert family. The beauty of the area is not lost on the Scheu clan, and they take full advantage of the region's great hunting, fishing and wide-open spaces.

Scheu Steel Supply is another thriving family entity. Also



Three generations of the Scheu family outside the current headquarters, formerly Upland City Hall. Left to right: Morgan Scheu (Craig's daughter), Craig Scheu (Allyn's son), Nevin Scheu (Leland's daughter), Allyson Scheu McQuade (Leland's daughter), Mark Scheu (Allyn's son), Leland Scheu, Curtis Scheu (Allyn's son), Allyn Scheu, and Kathy Scheu (Craig's wife).

located only a few blocks from the original warehouse, the company is currently overseen by Craig Scheu. During World War II, scarce resources affected everyone. When the war was over, the company's pent up demand for sheet metal provided W.L. Scheu all the reason he needed to spearhead the family's entrance into the steel distribution business.

In the years since and primarily under Leland's guidance, the company has grown to include service centers in Rancho Cucamonga, California and the Coachella Valley serving the Southern California market all the way to the Mexican border.

In 1992, R & D Fasteners was acquired from a Scheu Steel customer who primarily produced anchor bolts. The operation has since expanded, diversifying its product offering significantly. Products manufactured by R & D can be found being utilized anywhere from the New York City sewer system to U.S. Navy nuclear submarines. The in-house testing laboratory headed by Curtis

Scheu insures their quality and reliability. The family takes great pride in being able to manufacture and market these 100% American-made products despite increasingly tough global competition.

After family, community service is a close second

The Scheu family does not overlook the support they have received from their local communities. Both Allyn and

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Leland were raised in Upland, as were their children. In 2010 the city welcomed the opening of the Scheu Family YMCA. The Scheus joined forces with other community leaders to provide funding for the much-needed services the YMCA provides for local youth. It now has over 1,800 members, and a new state-of-the-art aquatic center is planned with the groundbreaking scheduled for 2013.

They are also extremely active in the San Antonio Hospital Foundation. The family has supported the expansion of the local facility at which almost all of Allyn and Leland's grandchildren were born. Allyn has served as a foundation board member, and son Craig has now followed suit. Family definitely comes first for the Scheus, but community is a close second.

Leland and Allyn's grandchildren, who are currently pursuing their education, will be the fifth generation of Scheus to carry on the citrus tradition. In the future, they will be encouraged to go out into the world and gain experience in whatever field they see fit. If they choose to follow in their parents' footsteps, they will draw upon those experiences as future



Orchard Rite wind machines.

leaders in the family businesses.


There is no doubt that despite the myriad of activities and enterprises the family members are involved in, the Scheus strongly value the ties to their roots. The family surrounds themselves with citrus, not only in the realm of business but at home as well.



Mark Scheu has plans for a citrus grove on land in Moorpark, on which he also hopes to build his future home. Allyn's house still sits in the middle of one of the last commercial lemon groves in the Upland area, and brother Leland is only a few blocks away.

In Allyn's words, "Even though we've diversified over the years, citrus has always been at the heart of our success and a key focus of the family. I see it remaining as an important part of our future."


Richard H. Barker is the founder and president of the Citrus Roots-Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation. Kim Randall is Executive Assistant, Scheu Management Corporation, Upland.

Photos courtesy of Scheu Management Corporation and Citrus Roots-Preserving Citrus Heritage Foundation. ●



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