



NatureScapes
INC.

Cultivated News

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20th Anniversary
1983-2003

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Nature Scapes Celebrates 20th Anniversary

— Lee Padgett

Ronald Reagan is in the White House and introduces “Star Wars” defense. Microsoft is but a glimmer in Bill Gates’ eye. MTV is still an infant while The Police and Michael Jackson are topping radio airwaves and Madonna releases her first single. At the box office, big hits include *Return of the Jedi*, *Risky Business*, and *The Big Chill*. *M*A*S*H* leaves the small screen generating record viewing while *Hill Street Blues*, *Dallas*, *Magnum P.I.*, *Dynasty*, *Happy Days*, and even Archie Bunker continue on strong. Cabbage Patch Dolls, Trivial Pursuit and Rubik’s Cube are the hot toys. Para-chute Pants, Swatch watches, and blue & pink hair dominate the fashion scene. It’s 1983 and one other major event happens: Rick Upchurch founds Nature Scapes.

Necessity is the mother of all invention, as well as enterprise. Rick started Nature Scapes after a series of unpleasant experiences with landscape contractors while working as a construction superintendent on projects for the MARTA rail line. “I enjoyed the satisfaction that came with completing a landscape project, and I knew I could deliver a better, timelier product,” explains Upchurch. It was that desire for service that



became the core commitment to quality and relationships for Rick and Nature Scapes. That commitment has served the company well as it now celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

Nature Scapes has seen an evolution from the small start-up in 1983 to a Top 10 landscape company in Metro Atlanta in 2003 with over \$5 million in annual revenues; an evolution from 1 employee to now over 115 dedicated employees; an evolution from a few clients to over 200 different clients today; an evolution from a home based small business to today, a corporation utilizing a state-of-the-art 18,000 square-foot facility situated on over 4 acres; and an evolution from a humble, risky start-up to a dedicated service company trusted by thousands of homeowners to treat their home like it is our own.

“When most people think of landscaping, they think of beautiful gardens and a blending of natural plants and building structures. Of course, all this is true. But I started this business because I realized that landscaping is about so much more than that. It’s about listening to people and understanding what they want to achieve with their real estate investments. It’s about developing innovative solutions to environmental challenges. It’s about supporting clients with responsive service and attention to details,” explains Upchurch about his business philosophy. It is that very passion that enables Nature Scapes to boast an average length of service for clients and employees at about 10 years, with many being well beyond that number.

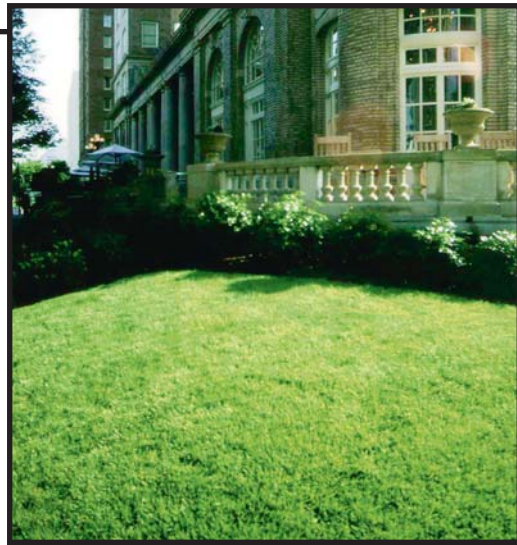
And what about the future? According to Upchurch, the company doesn’t plan to let reaching such a business milestone lull it into complacency. “New marketing, quality control, and management systems have us excited and poised to begin the next 20 years.” Upchurch is also excited about the continued growth of his company: reaching new clients, new market segments, and expanding the company’s line-up of services. All this while continuing to perfect the business model that got Nature Scapes its first 20 years, summed up in the company’s 9 Core Values:

- Passion
- Proactive Commitment
- Continuous Improvement
- Dependability
- Pride
- Responsibility
- Organization
- Perseverance
- Integrity

The Georgian Terrace Hotel

—Rick Barnes

Nature Scapes' assistance with the landscape renovation and maintenance of the Georgian Terrace Hotel resulted in awards from the Metro-Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association in 2002 and from the Georgia Green Industry Association in 2003. The National Historic Landmark, across Peachtree Street from the Fox Theatre and built in 1911, underwent a complete renovation, culminating with the updating of the grounds in April 2001. The hotel has long been a destination of the famous, including the stars of "Gone With the Wind" who held their premiere party at the Georgian Terrace in 1939. The focus of the landscape renovation and ongoing maintenance by Nature Scapes is to provide a quiet, garden-like atmosphere for the guests amid the bustle of the city and a living compliment to the outstanding architecture of this historic property.



Nature Scapes Management Team Learns To "C.O.P.E."

The Fall 2002 strategic planning meeting of the Nature Scapes management team ended with an interesting twist for the participants: a Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience!



This particular program is run by the Atlanta Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The capable COPE staff probably found the Nature Scapes staff to be more challenging than a group of Scouts: while problems were solved and fears conquered, the managers often found themselves doubled over with laughter and the object of strange looks from the pro-

gram leaders! "It was an absolutely fantastic program," said Allen Clemons. "It showed us all that we could work as a team to solve problems and still have fun doing it!" The Nature Scapes staff will long remember their Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience, and will long be remembered by the COPE Staff at Woodruff! Some of the highlights are pictured here...

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GOOD Migrations

Part Three in a 4-part series on the selection of plants from their native habitats for use as ornamentals

—Rick Barnes

Sharp Eyes, Sharp Knives, Tissue Culture Labs, and the Gene Splice...

Don Shadow, owner of Shadow Nursery in Winchester, Tennessee, one day spied a seedling Dogwood in his Nursery that looked different from the rest. The plant was taller and had less width than the other seedlings in the group. That day gave birth to a new variety of Dogwood, *Cornus florida* 'Dixie Colonnade', a seedling selection that produces a columnar form of our native Dogwood. The present parent plant is 22 feet tall and only 9 feet wide, half the width of the native tree! Don is one of those "Horticultural Conquistadors" I spoke of in Part 1 of this series. He has literally been all over the world looking for new varieties of ornamental plants that can be useful in gardens and landscapes. He doesn't forget to check his back yard, though, and has found several worthy varieties like 'Dixie Colonnade' right there! Don Shadow's skill with a grafting knife brought us yet another Dogwood variety, *Cornus florida* 'Little Princess', a compact form of a variety we commonly use at Nature Scapes, 'Cherokee Princess'. Don uses budding to graft buds that are true 'Little Princess' buds onto a hardy Dogwood rootstock.

For centuries, growers have relied on chance seedlings or asexual propagation methods like budding to find and increase the numbers of superior varieties of plants. Scientists sporting tiny paintbrushes take the pollen from one flower and apply it to another to create a seed that MIGHT produce one seedling with the superior qualities of both parent plants. These seeds, like Don's Dogwood seedlings, would then have to be grown and evaluated to see if the desired qualities were indeed present, and if so, produced in numbers for nurseries, and eventually, the gardening consumer. These methods of plant propagation and development of new varieties are still widely utilized today, but the late 20th and early 21st Centuries have brought new tools to the horticulturist's bag of tricks.

Gene splicing, for instance, is a method of plant development used primarily for food crops. Genes are "assembled" by placing the 4 nucleotides of the DNA molecule in a certain order, this being the determining factor of what traits the gene will express. These are then placed into the plant either with *Agrobacterium*, a soil



Bacteria, or with a "gene gun"- a device that shoots gene-coated gold or tungsten into the plant. Once "spliced" in this manner, the resulting plants, sometimes thousands growing in petri dishes in labs, have to be observed just like Don Shadow's

Dogwood seedlings, given the fact that only 1 or 2 plants out of every 10 are suitable for further propagation. Products of gene splicing include crop plants such as corn that carry a gene making the plants resistant to herbicides sprayed on fields to control weeds. One of the fears is that this herbicide-resistant gene could get into the weed plants themselves, creating a monster crop of "super weeds".

Cloning was used to produce mass quantities of plants long before Dolly the Sheep, who recently died at age 6, half the lifetime of a normal sheep, became a topic of debate. The final stop on this sojourn of Bio-engineering was at the Tissue Culture Lab of ITSAUL PLANTS. Bobby Saul explains that tissue culture is an added step and an added expense in the production of plants, but vital if the growth rate is slow, the plant is difficult to propagate from cuttings or seeds, or if there is a limited number of parent plants available. Tissue culture involves the use of growing medium (agar) and plant growth hormones in a sterile laboratory environment. It felt like observing surgery as I sanitized my shoes, put surgical socks over them, and sanitized my hands before entering the lab. Bobby says that getting a clean piece of meristematic tissue from the plant is one of the biggest challenges. While just a few cells contain all the genetic information to clone the plant, there are bacteria and fungus spores in every nook and cranny of the tissue sample. Once the clean tissue is obtained (Stage 1), the tissue is fed with a witches brew of agar and hormones to cause massive top growth replication of plants (Stage 2). Once the desired number of plants has been obtained, the hormone portion of the growing medium is changed so that the plants will develop a root system (Stage 3). Then the plants are removed from the agar and placed in soil. This vastly oversimplified version of what goes on fails to capture the technical skill required to accomplish this successfully, nor does it reflect the excitement of Bobby in being able to offer plants to consumers that could not have been produced in large numbers even five years ago!



So now we have seen other aspects of the horticulturists' relentless pursuit of new plants. In the 4th and final part of this series, we will look at some of the ones that got away...

Credits: Don Shadow, Shadow Nursery, Winchester Tennessee; Bobby Saul, ItSaul Plants, Chamblee, Georgia; National Geographic Magazine, May, 2002, "Food".

W H O W E A R E

Cultivated News is published two times a year by Nature Scapes, Inc., for twenty years a provider of landscaping, maintenance, irrigation and floriculture services to the metro Atlanta area.

Nature Scapes, Inc. is a charter member of GGIA — Georgia Green Industry Association, MALTA — Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association, GAI — Georgia Irrigation Association, and CAI — Community Associations Institute. We also belong to the Southern Nurseryman's Association.

Nature Scapes, Inc. operates a drug-free workplace as certified by the State Board of Workers' Compensation.

If you have any topics or questions you would like to see discussed or elaborated on in a future issue of the newsletter, please call and let us know.

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MALTA to Nature Scapes: "Best Ever"

-Lee Padgett

Members from the Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association (MALTA) were the guests of honor last fall at a dinner meeting hosted by Nature Scapes. The monthly trade group meeting is usually held at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, but members were treated to a special opportunity to tour Nature Scapes' modern, state-of-the-art facility in Lilburn.

Representatives from companies all around Atlanta and north Georgia were given the unique opportunity to tour all areas of the facility, listen to presentations from Nature Scapes' management staff, and learn new techniques and efficiencies in the question and answer sessions.

Rick Upchurch, company president, is proud that Nature Scapes is one of only three companies in the Atlanta area to have hosted this type of meeting for MALTA. His passion for his company and the landscape industry is exemplified by his desire to share with industry colleagues. MALTA seeks to encourage professionalism, education, and ethics throughout the landscape industry, especially within its membership.



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