

# GROWERTALKS

## Acres & Acres

8/1/2020

# 1,000

Chris Beytes



**CHRIS BEYTES**

In case you missed the cover, or got here via the *Green Profit* side, you're holding in your hands the 1,000th issue of *GrowerTalks*. Pretty impressive, eh? That's 83 years and four months of continuous publishing, from the end of the Great Depression through WWII and various other conflicts, economic booms and downturns, and several energy crises, yet always remaining focused on one task: Helping you grow and sell better crops.

Of course, back then they were more dapper than us, wearing coats and hats in the greenhouse and smoking pipes.

Perhaps, out of respect, you'll put this issue on the coffee table alongside the Norman Rockwell picture book and the dish of Starlite Mints. Or, more likely, it will live on the back of the men's room toilet, then, when dogeared, make it to the recycling bin. Which is actually preferable to us, as it proves that you

and your staff have gleaned something useful from its pages.

That's been our objective since May 1937, when George J. Ball penned the first issue on a legal pad balanced on his knee. As his granddaughter Anna mentioned in her piece, it was an article on sweet peas that prompted the birth of the magazine, but those early issues covered a wide range of cut and potted crops. Exacum and schizanthus were featured in early issues—less-common crops that I grew in my Florida greenhouse. Cut mums were featured heavily, as they were a widely popular crop.

Remember, up until after WWII, every town had a florist and that florist grew most everything he sold in a glass greenhouse (probably a Lord & Burnham or, as in the case with Ball, AGMCO—American Greenhouse Manufacturing Co.—I know because somebody sent me images of the AGMCO catalog from the late 1920s, which featured pictures of Ball's greenhouse range). The industry was made up of mom-and-pop businesses that were all hungry for information, most of which came from books like the RedBook and magazines like *GrowerTalks*.

George and his sons (they all wrote for the magazine; Vic famously went on to be the editor-in-chief until his death in 1997) also covered issues like pricing, marketing and other business topics we still cover today.

And travel! If there's anything truly unique about *GrowerTalks* back then (and today, too, I like to think) it's that it covers the world. Before WWII, George was going to Europe and even Japan to bring back varieties and cultural ideas from the growers he met. His black-and-white photos from those early issues are a horticultural time capsule, fascinating to me as I read about companies I've visited, too. There's a photo of Mr. Sakata in 1938 ... I met his

grandson in 2011! As for me, well, I've accumulated more than a million airline miles following in George's footsteps.

Anna also wrote, "Grandfather's philosophy was very clear. He believed all information should be shared with everyone—quickly and openly."

Back then, monthly was quickly. Today, quickly means almost instantly.

When I studied journalism, we were still using Selectric typewriters and carbon paper. Photos (film) were processed in a darkroom. Communication was by telephone, correspondence was by mail. If I needed the answer to an obscure question, I called the reference desk at the local library.

Today, I can reach 23,000 of you via e-newsletter within minutes of hearing important news. And I can post it to one of numerous social media sites and potentially reach millions. Photos are more instant than Polaroid ever imagined and also easily shared globally.

Even better is how easily you can share your news, pictures and video with me. A letter to the editor is as easily as clicking on my name at the bottom of an email. And can you imagine what George would think of Zoom meetings?

I've been with *GrowerTalks* for 27 of its 83 years, which means I've been involved in only a third of the 1,000 issues. But I've spent much time in our archives, reading what George and his boys and the growers of the day had to say, and I can tell you this: Times change, and technology changes, but the challenges remain the same. Thankfully, so does the openness and willingness with which you share your stories with me and Jen Zurko and all the other editors. I hope that remains true for the next 1,000 issues. An occasion, we will celebrate in December of 2103.

That is, if I don't forget! I'd better put it in Outlook. **GT**