



NEWS

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Henk van Dam Receives SAF's Gold Medal Award at SAF Palm Springs 2007

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Sept. 27, 2007 -- The Society of American Florists awarded Henk van Dam, founder of Triflor b.v., in Oude Niedorp, Netherlands the 2007 Gold Medal Award on Sept. 27 during SAF Palm Springs 2007, SAF's 123rd Annual Convention in Palm Springs, Calif. The award is presented to a company or an individual in recognition of a product that has had a lasting impact on the commercial floriculture industry. Van Dam was selected as the 2007 recipient for transforming the tulip industry by introducing a range of new varieties, and helping to standardize practices that revolutionized tulip production.

Starting Out

Van Dam started growing tulips when he was still a student at the Agricultural University in Roermond. "He focused himself on one thing only: tulips," says son Erik van Dam of Triflor -- and his focus only intensified. In 1965, van Dam founded Triflor b.v., a growing operation, with two other growers (who are now no longer involved with Triflor).

A Breed Apart

In the 1960s and 70s, there were only two main tulip varieties, Apeldoorn and Golden Apeldoorn, which represented more than half the acreage of tulip bulbs. While these varieties were easy to grow, their vase life was not good, so van Dam focused on breeding and producing special varieties – and it is this focus that drastically increased the varieties available on the market. “He’s probably been as instrumental in the tulip industry in the last 40 or 50 years as anybody that I know of,” says Leo Roozen, AAF, of Washington Bulb Company, Inc., in Mt. Vernon, Wash.

Van Dam played an important role in introducing new varieties such as White Dream, Yokohama, Leen v.d. Mark and Negrita to the market, by producing them in mass quantities while they were still considered new colors. These colors are now considered industry staples. In 1979, Triflor became a shareholder of Hybris and helped found Vertuco, two groups of flower growers that worked to increase new varieties on the market. Hybris and Vertuco have produced numerous successful tulip varieties, which have won many awards, since their inception. Tulips bred at Triflor are now introduced through Vertuco.

“The industry has been able to grow from only a few thousand hectares [of tulip production] in the ‘60s and ‘70s, to the ten thousand-hectare [industry] it represents today. By using new varieties in flower production and breeding, [Henk] played an important role in that development,” says Erik. The total acreage of the cultivars in the development of which van Dam was involved is now about 2,200ha.

News Ideas

Producing new tulip varieties was not van Dam’s only area of innovation. In order to grow, tulip bulbs must be subjected to cold temperatures for a number of weeks, and van Dam was one of the first growers to cool tulip bulbs in “coolstores,” instead of outdoors. This increased efficiency and decreased risk and labor costs. Due in part to van Dam’s extensive use of coolstores, most tulip growers now use them, rather than cooling their tulips outside.

In the 1980's, Triflor also worked to extend the growing season – and deliver flowers four weeks early – by growing tulips in the South of France. The company also started to grow tulips in the Southern hemisphere in the mid-90s.

The Company Today

Triflor, one of the Netherlands' largest tulip bulb growers and forcers, has been run, since the early '90s, by van Dam's daughter Judith, son Erik and Geert Hageman. The company exports 85 million bulbs a year, produces 25-30 million flowers a year and is the largest tulip grower in New Zealand. In 2004, van Dam was honored with the Dutch Growers Association's (KAVB) Dix Penning Award for his breeding activities and has also been awarded the Golden Pin by Flowerauction Aalsmeer (VBA) for his important role in introducing new varieties. Although retired, van Dam splits his time between the Netherlands and the South of France and continues to test new varieties for Triflor, Vertuco and Hybris.

For more information or to nominate an industry member for SAF's Gold Medal Award, visit www.safnow.org/awards or contact SAF's Debi Aker at (800) 336-4743; daker@safnow.org. Contact Shelley Estersohn at (800) 336-4743, or sestersohn@safnow.org for photographs from the SAF 2007 Industry Awards Dinner.

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The Society of American Florists is the association leader for all segments of the floral industry including wholesalers, growers and retailers. SAF is proud to provide marketing, business and government services for more than 12,000 participants in the U.S. floral industry.