

# Lyman/Tremont Group named Retailer of the Year

■ By Richard Keller, editor

The Lyman/Tremont Group is two companies with the same top management team. Entrepreneurial managers are employed for each of the 14 separate operations and facilities spread across northern California agricultural regions north, west and south of Sacramento.

“We have been on a steady growth curve for at least 10 years. I believe that our business model is working quite well,” said Scott Mansell, CFO of overall operations.

Besides agricultural retail fertilizer and chemical facilities, the companies have a seed division, trucking division, agricultural parts/hardware stores and wholesale fertilizer division (both wholly owned and joint venture).

For the most part, as companies have been acquired into the Lyman/Tremont Group, they have kept their original business name and some degree of independence to serve the wide variety of growers.

“Every location manager is his own entrepreneur, and we provide the resources for them to grow the individual businesses. We really believe in that, and I think that is what makes our company unique,” Mansell said.

The ultimate leadership comes from Les Lyman, chairman, and Johnny Council, CEO and president, plus a board of directors. Harvey Lyman was the founder of the company about 57 years ago, and his son has been the visionary for the huge growth of the company.

It was 1954 when Harvey Lyman ventured out on his own to form Harvey Lyman Chemicals at Walnut Grove. It was 1974 when Les Lyman joined his father’s company.

“The Walnut Grove site is the springboard for everything else that has been done as the combined Lyman/Tremont Group,” explained Council.

## AWARD FOR MANY REASONS

All this success in growth, the way it has occurred with trusted employees, the company’s dedication to customer service, its commitment to community involvement and its proven environmental concern is the backdrop for why the Lyman/Tremont Group was selected the Agricultural Retailers Association 2011 Retailer of the Year.



Les Lyman (right) accepts the ARA Retailer of the Year award from board member Jon Nienas with Monsanto Company, the major sponsor of the award.

Lyman explained that his stint in the early 70s as a representative of Shell Chemical in Indiana taught him a lot about distribution and retail business as he studied the three-step distribution channel and how to engage what he learned from channel business associates for use in the California two-step distribution channel. He had a vision for taking an independent business and growing it and diversifying it when he came back to work with his father.

“We may be 10 to 100 times bigger than we were when we started, but the entrepreneurial spirit that I had as a young man, and think I still have today, is the same spirit that we make sure our managers have to run their businesses. We get out of the way and let them go for it after there is agreement on what the objectives are,” Lyman said.

The company is extremely proud of its employees. “We have recruited and brought people in because of their talents and their belief in the company. We recruit career people, and we continue to recruit them after we hire them,” Council said. “You should never quit recruiting the people that work for you, and good people attract good people. This is the whole thing about our company and its success.”

Council said, “Les has a philosophy of giving you all you need to succeed and then holding you accountable.” That is true for our entire team, he added.

## PCA MAJOR IMPORTANCE

The Lyman/Tremont Group has approximately 190 employees, and a very important element of the company’s success is the 51 in-the-field pest control advisors (PCAs) consulting with customers and potential customers.

“I think there are about 200 different crops grown in the area where we operate,” Council said. “So, our PCAs have to be knowledgeable about a lot of different crops.”

Gary Silveria, sales and marketing manager for the Lyman/Tremont Group, said, “We find it critical that we personalize our service. We determine which salesman is the best salesman

for a particular customer. It is imperative that we match our salesmen and customers from a relationship basis, as well as a business basis for what crops a grower is producing.”

Silveria suggested the company works hard to earn business. “I think, in a lot of cases, it is the knowledge that we have and the resources we utilize that differentiates us. We have to capitalize on small differentiations and bring value to the grower.”

Knowing as much as possible about growers’ operations, their neighbors’ operations, the government regulations in effect and the suburbanites living at the edge of fields is necessary for the company’s PCAs to make recommendations.

“Urban encroachment is a big thing. Depending on where you are located and where the fields are is always a consideration for a PCA,” said Silveria. “They have to know the neighbors and know their operations, too. That’s all part of the decision-making process for writing recommendations. In a lot of cases, we might have to use a softer chemistry in those buffers to sensitive sites.”

Soft chemistry use is in line with making recommendations related to organic crop production, which the company has recognized as an opportunity. “There are a lot of trips to the fields that don’t result in any product use, and in some cases throughout a whole crop’s life there might not be much of any type of treatment,” Silveria said.

## MANY STATE REGULATIONS

Regulations about when and what can be applied is only one part of all the regulations that the state of California places on ag retailers. Recommendations for pesticide applications cannot be made other than by state-licensed PCAs who must also complete continuing education credits to keep their license.

California adds on its own layers of regulations stricter than federal rules for such things as worker safety, ag products transport, diesel fuel handling, storm water runoff, facility safety and construction sites.

“We have what the federal government requires and then we have another layer of state requirements that makes it a little more complex and challenging to do business. Some of those challenges are financial because of increased fees and investments associated with doing business in California,” said David Ito, manager of human resources and regulatory compliance.

Because of all those regulations that not only are in effect for ag retailers but also for its grower customers, the Lyman/Tremont Group along with two other investors, backed the start up of MPV Consolidated, a grower safety and compliance company.

Pam Emery, manager of MPV Consolidated, explained how the company provides “safety training programs and compliance-based services so that growers can meet regulations.” She said, “It sometimes becomes really overwhelming for the farmer who is not large enough to hire someone full time to manage all these regulations. They just want to farm.”

The Lyman/Tremont Group has seen the value in cooperating with competitors over the years for the betterment of agriculture and growers of the region. The biggest joint venture has been the Inland Terminal, a wholesale liquid fertilizer tank farm and dry fertilizer storage facility, just completed.

“Inland provides a service to the industry for bringing product in (by rail), storing it, transloading it and moving it to the farm gate in a timely manner. Inland sits in the middle of the marketplace. It is not two or three hours to the port of Stockton. It helps manage issues like hours of service, regulations on trucking, port-entry security and labor issues at the port,” explained Council. **AG**

**Construction was progressing on the 30,000-ton dry fertilizer storage of the Inland Terminal, which already has 30,000 tons of liquid storage. Because of state and county environmental regulations, the facility had to be built without disturbing the large Valley Oak directly between the site’s liquid and dry storage.**

