

## Front Lines

6/23/2011

### Jan S. Ohms, Legendary Bulbsman

*Ellen C. Wells*



Jan S. Ohms, one of the Dutch flower bulb sector's most respected members, died Friday, May 27, after a brief illness at the age of 85. Jan was CEO of three American direct mail order gardening companies: Van Engelen, Inc.; John Scheepers, Inc.; and John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds, LLC, all of Bantam, Connecticut.

His career spans from service in the Dutch underground during the Second World War, to service in the U.S. Air Force as an intelligence officer during the Cold War, to his more than 60 years in horticulture and flower bulbs in the U.S. and Holland. Mr. Ohms was known throughout the industry as a keen businessman who believed that highest quality held the key to success.

Jan Ohms was born in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1925 to citizens of the Netherlands. In 1929, the family returned to Noordwijk, the Netherlands, where Jan grew up working in the family's flower bulb nurseries and bulb fields. He earned a specialized degree in Ornamental Horticulture from the Rykstuinbouwschool in Lisse, Holland. When the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, the teenaged Mr. Ohms continued his horticultural studies while also serving with the Dutch underground fighting against the Nazi occupation. After the war, he returned to the States and enrolled in the University of Connecticut, where he graduated with a degree in Landscape Architecture and Agricultural Economics. After college, Mr. Ohms served in the U.S. Air Force and with Voice of America as an intelligence officer.

Following his service, Jan started a private flower bulb company, Jan S. Ohms Inc., in Stamford, Connecticut, that sold flower bulbs to large private estates up and down the eastern seaboard. In the 1970s, he acquired the Van Engelen flower bulb company and launched the famous Van Engelen wholesale flower bulb catalog. In 1991, Mr. Ohms entered the retail mail order business when he bought the John Scheepers flower bulb company and its classic Beauty from Bulbs retail catalog. In 2002, Jan published the first issue of the John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds catalog. Today, the Van Engelen and John Scheepers flower bulb companies are among the largest importers of Dutch flower bulbs in the U.S. Over his lifetime, Mr. Ohms is credited with supplying close to a billion flower bulbs to botanical, public and private gardens across the United States. **GP**