

Ron Kujawa and Family: NALP Icons



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The Kujawa family's leadership in the [National Association of Landscape Professionals](#) is legendary. Ron Kujawa and his sons, Chris and Joe, who all hold roles in [Kujawa Enterprises Incorporated](#) (KEI), based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have been NALP fixtures for decades. Chris was chairman of the [National Collegiate Landscape Competition](#) for eight years and helped expand the number of participating colleges and universities. Joe has been a loyal and active member of NALP for years and served as a director of the scholarship program his brother helped establish and has served on key committees.

Ron became active in the association when he and other members initiated the creation of a landscape maintenance committee. Over the years, Ron has volunteered on other numerous committees, often serving as chairman, and later became an association director.

One of his proudest achievements is conceiving the idea for the [Green Industry and Equipment Expo](#) (GIE+EXPO)—now held annually in Louisville, Kentucky. It is considered the industry's largest networking conference and equipment show, as well as being a large financial contributor to NALP.

In the beginning

As a young man, Kujawa did a tour in the Army as a military policeman (MP) and embarked on a career as a traveling salesman of engineering equipment in Wisconsin. He recalls, "I drove on two lane roads—no expressways—and ate in greasy spoon cafes or supper clubs." He resigned the day he married his wife, Sally. "I wanted a successful marriage and worked with too many people whose marriages were not."

In the early 1960s, he took over his father's flower, feed and farm supply store. When his father died a few years later, Ron and his brother bought out their uncle. The brothers ran the beer distributor side of the enterprise,

while Sally focused on the farm supply side. The Kujawa brothers had to support two growing families, so they pursued an aggressive sales program, increasing the business ten-fold within two years.

Today, KEI's clients are a long list of Fortune 500 companies, municipal, educational and institutional entities, as well as property managers and private individuals. The company is well known for its fleet of bright, orange trucks—sometimes known more than the KEI name.

In 1977, Ron, Sally and their four children attended the first student competition hosted by [Robert Callaway](#) at Mississippi State University. "It was a very enjoyable and unique experience for our family," Kujawa says. "It was refreshing to see lots of enthusiasm in the students. Kids were different 25 years ago. They were eager to impress the industry."

Industry validation

It is not surprising that the Kujawa sons became active in NALP because many of their family vacations revolved around NALP conferences and events.

Chris Kujawa's early attendance at NCLC helped fuel the drive to establish a scholarship program for deserving students to attend the competition. With colleague Mike Glowacki from Nantucket, the pair spearheaded efforts to create a foundation. They hatched the idea as students attending Student Career Days at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Thus far, [the foundation has supported](#) 864 students for a total of \$902,400 in scholarships. The Kujawa family was the first to pledge at the Ambassador sponsor level.

As Kujawa reflected on his involvement with NALP, he is also proud of the association's leadership during his tenure as president with Deborah Dennis as the executive director. With Rod Bailey's initiative from Seattle, Washington, the first strategic planning committee established NALP goals.

"Under Deborah's leadership and Rod's plan, things began to come together," Kujawa explains. "She led us through a turbulent growth period. Previously, the executive director's agenda did not always align with the needs of our members. With her guidance, the association became a member-driven organization that gave rise and meaning to what was known as ALCA MAGIC."

Kujawa's passion for NCLC and NALP is evident in his family's commitment and leadership within the association. He also believes the competition's success belongs to the professors and schools who diligently work to prepare the students and host the competitions. "Over the years, the event has been held at four-year universities and even community colleges. The event is really a showcase for them and their institutions," he says.

As Kujawa reflects on his 44 years in the landscape industry, he remembers a pivotal moment. In 1999, at an NALP meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida, it was the first time he recalls venture capitalists attending an association meeting. Kujawa believes when this happened, the moment became the ultimate validation of the industry.