

# Claude Roberge.

## Hero and Pioneer of the Turfgrass Industry.

### 1939–2008.

Claude was a *hero* and a *pioneer* of the Canadian turfgrass maintenance industry. For *seventeen years*, from **1983** to **2000**, he participated in some of the most important events and decisions that shaped our turfgrass world. His decisions and participation in turfgrass industry matters influence us across this nation to this very day.

We know that his name is not known in most of Canada, except for Quebec. We will correct that oversight in the following *tribute* to his life.

In **1939**, Claude was born into a family of fourteen children on the family ancestral farm located on « *l'Île d'Orléans* » (the Island of Orleans). This small, magical, and historic island, which is located in the Saint Lawrence River, just minutes from Quebec City, was always near-and-dear to Claude's heart. It was here that, as a young man, he first learned about plants and horticulture.

In **1965**, Claude founded, with his wife and lifelong partner Ginette, his landscape maintenance company in Charlesbourg, a suburb of Quebec City. It was named « *Claude Roberge Entretien Paysager* ». Claude worked tirelessly at developing a progressive and successful business. As the years progressed, he continued to offer an increasing number of services to residential, commercial, and industrial customers. These included : mowing, fertilization, pest control, aeration, dethatching, topdressing, overseeding, liming, pruning, winter protection, and weeding flower beds. He was also regularly employed at « *Imperial Tobacco* » from the **1960s** until **1987**.

The company evolved into one of the *first* truly modern « *full-service* » maintenance companies in our industry. By **1985**, the company name was modernized to « *Ferti-Sol Plus* ». At this time, the company was engulfed in a maelstrom of expansion, given the fact that the **1980s** was the decade where « *professional lawn care* » had become a « *fad* » with the public. Claude boasted much about his team of highly-qualified employees, including one, and eventually two, provincially-certified « *agronomists* » whose responsibilities included trouble-shooting and employee-training. Also in **1985**, as well as **1989** and **1995**, Claude expanded the business with new, larger, and improved warehouse and office locations.

In the **1980s**, Claude innovated further with his company, by providing his existing customers with the door-to-door delivery of Christmas trees, as well as the installation and removal of winter lights and ornaments. Claude reasoned that this was sufficient to keep him in business year-round. « **Ferti-Sol Plus** » continues to offer this service to this day.

During the **1980s**, when the turf maintenance industry needed a man of his experience the most, Claude Roberge stepped forward.

By **1985**, Claude became one of the **founders** and original board member of Canada's *first* Professional Lawn Care Association (which was later known as « **A.S.H.O.Q.** », « **Association des Services en Horticulture Ornementale du Québec** »). Bringing forth his twenty years of business experience in the industry, he helped shape the association's charter and missions for the coming years. He was especially active in defending the rights of the industry against Quebec's rabid « **environmental movement** » that sought its destruction.

Claude was among the *first* visionary pioneers who supported best management practices, integrated pest management, sign-posting, and the use of organic and natural fertilizers. « **Ferti-Sol Plus** » also became one of the *first* lawn companies in Canada to be equipped with state-of-the-art warehousing facilities that included a government-specified fertilizer storage building and a « **rinse water recycle system** ». All of these concepts were not fashionable in the industry at the time they were conceived by Claude.

From **1997** to **1999**, Claude was appointed President of the A.S.H.O.Q. association. During his tenure, he made some of the most difficult decisions ever to be made by an industry leader. Claude approved the launch of the legal challenge against the Town of Hudson. This town, whose narrow-minded band of councillors had unfortunately capitulated under the pressure of the « **environmental movement** », created a by-law that was severely and exclusively prejudicial against the professional lawn care industry. As President, Claude refused to back away from the Hudson affront, and committed most of his association's vast resources towards the destruction of its by-law. As we all know, the attempt was ill-fated. But Claude had made the right decision. He unflinchingly defended us all at *any cost*.

Claude Roberge was likely the last of our industry leaders to have fought valiantly against the « **environmental movement** », a task that few today would even consider anywhere in North America.

It should be pointed out that, throughout the **1980s** and **1990s**, most the A.S.H.O.Q. Board of Director's meetings were held in Montreal. These were scheduled mostly monthly, sometimes twice per month, and even weekly at one point (during times of crisis). Claude attended every meeting *at his own expense*. He travelled by car an agonizing *three hours each way*, from Quebec City to Montreal. Since many exhausting meetings started at five p.m., and lasted until past midnight, he often had to even pay for his own accommodations. Claude, almost always accompanied by his wife Ginette, sacrificed his time, money, and energy, even in the **1980s**, when, at one point, he ran a business in the throes of expansion while he maintained his regular job at « **Imperial Tobacco** ». Somehow, through all this, Claude still maintained that his family was his main priority.

Despite his great industry accomplishments, Claude was understandably proudest of his family. He considered himself very fortunate to have married Ginette, his unwavering partner for more than *thirty years*. He correctly prepared for the transition of « **Ferti-Sol Plus** » to the next generation in his family. As a result, his son, Martin, and his daughter, Line, confidently took over the reins his family business in **2000**. The company today employs over *sixty* people, operates a fleet of *thirty* trucks, with *eight* tractor-mounted mowing units and *twenty-five* regular cutting units.

Readers can take a peek at the family business of Claude Roberge at the following web site : [www.fertisolplus.com](http://www.fertisolplus.com). Although the site is entirely in the French language, visitors can still remark that its content demonstrates enthusiasm, pride, and unpretentiousness.

Claude was known for many wonderful qualities, including *honesty* and *perseverance*. He had a *quit wit* and a *heartly laugh*. He was a *no-nonsense* kind of guy who got to the point very quickly in any discussion. He was a *good debater*, a *great story-teller*, and a « *bon vivant* » (i.e. he loved life). And, above all, he was a *great family man*.

*Thank you Claude for all that you have done for us. You were heroic in every sense of the word. The turf and ornamental maintenance industry owes you a lot.*

This was written by your friends Guy Van Den Abeele and WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE AND NORAH G. ***Requiescat in pace***. (May you rest in peace.)