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Ag steals limelight at Rose Parade

Key Points

■ Dole's Sweepstakes float was the second in two years of participating.

■ The Bayer float featured an astronaut and his brother, a rose care expert.

■ The RFD-TV float contained a 35-foot-tall classic image of Roy Rogers.

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

AGRICULTURE claimed star status at the 2012 Rose Parade in Pasadena. Dole Foods took the Sweepstakes trophy for the Westlake Village company, and Bayer, Research Triangle Park, N.C., won the Director's trophy for outstanding artistic merit in design and floral presentation.
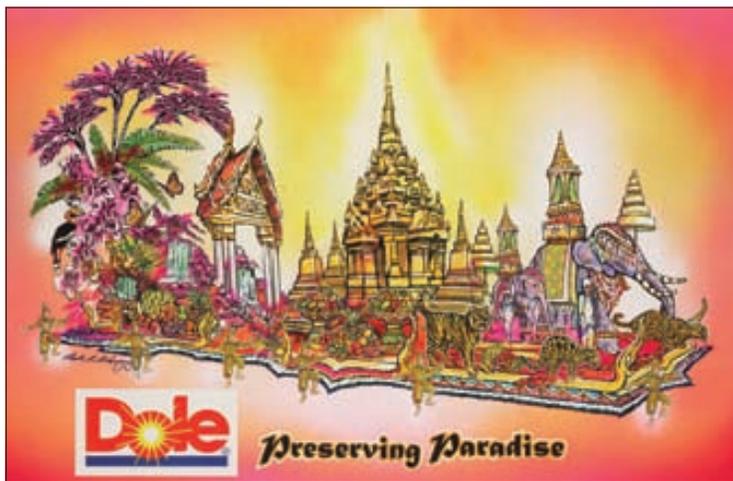
RFD-TV honored Roy Rogers with its float, as Roy would have been 100 years old on Nov. 5, 2011. The float was accompanied by a new group of 100 Roy Rogers Riders, each riding a golden palomino like Rogers' famous horse, Trigger.

20 year title

Dole became the first entry in the last 20 years to win in its first two years of participation.

Dole's award-winning float "Preserving Paradise" honored the unsurpassed beauty of Thailand, where Dole grows some of its fruit with responsible, sustainable growing and operating practices.

The float featured a temple styled after Thailand's opulent royal palace and captured Thailand's ornate and unique architecture. A lifelike elephant draped in floral jewels and tapestries, a sculpted tiger and two leopards all exemplified Thailand's on-

going preservation of wildlife conservation. To celebrate the diversity of Thailand, 20 Thai dancers dressed in traditional Thai costumes performed among the exotic and rare flowers from across the world — and, of course, fresh and healthy fruit grown by Dole just for the Rose Parade.

Created by Fiesta Parade Floats, "Preserving Paradise" stood 55 feet long, 18 feet wide and more 26 feet tall. It weighed in at just over 22 tons, which is the equivalent of more than 10 elephants.

Brothers dream

Bayer Advanced's "Garden of Imagination" float featured NASA space shuttle astronaut Rex Walheim and his brother, Lance Walheim, the Bayer Advanced rose care expert. The Walheim brothers who grew up working in the family garden near San Francisco, and dreamt of what could be.

The Tournament of Roses' "Just Imagine …" theme inspired the creation of the Bayer float.

Rex Walheim imagined flying in space and achieved the ultimate dream of becoming a NASA astronaut. He was mission specialist on three NASA shuttle missions, including Atlantis (STS-135), the final mission of the U.S. shuttle program, in July 2011. He's currently working on NASA's new deep-space exploration system that is scheduled to take its first test flight in 2017.

Lance Walheim imagined working with flowers and plants. Now he's a horticulturist, owns a 17-acre citrus ranch and is the Bayer Advanced rose care expert. He's written or co-written more than 30 books, including the best-seller "Roses for Dummies." He provides gardening advice to millions of people each year.

Bayer's float featured 20,000 roses, including the world debut of the 2012 All-America Rose Selections Award Winner, "Sunshine Daydream," a beautiful yellow rose. The float also featured a rocket contrail that reaches 30 feet into the air. A rocket contrail is like a vapor trail — only this one featured thousands of beautiful roses. The contrail symbolized the idea that if we "just imagine," we can reach for the stars and achieve great things.
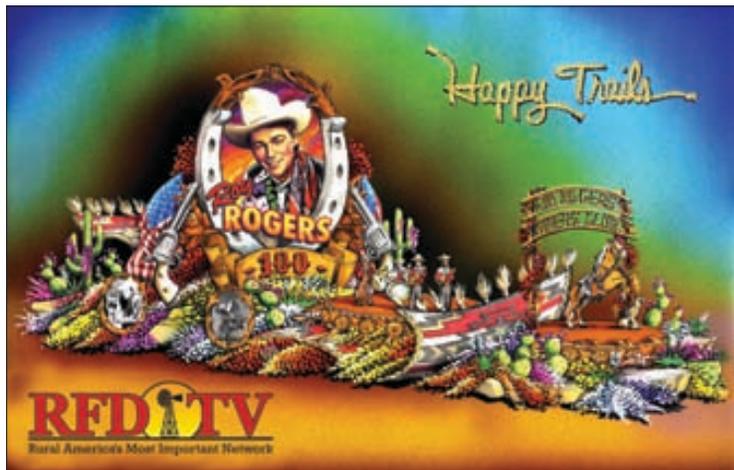
Birthday honor

The "Happy Trails" float was built by Phoenix Decorating in a mix of organic materials that mimic what Roy Rogers would've seen on the trails. The 35-foot-tall classic image of the singing American cowboy was framed by a lucky silver horseshoe mirrored by pearl-handled, duel-size shooters, and was flanked by American flags.

The entrance to the Rogers floral ranch is guarded by his loyal German shepherd, Bullet, and his pride golden palomino, Trigger. The duo are the actual preserved remains of the animals, and not organically decorated duplicates. They sat surrounded by desert fauna underneath a bark-covered arch gate identifying the Roy Rogers Riders Club, which at its peak boasted over 2.5 million members worldwide.

RFD-TV will continue to honor Roy Rogers this year with a Trigger and Bullet Happy Trails Tour, making stops all around the United States and Canada.

20-YEAR FIRST: Dole became the first entry in the last 20 years to win in its first two years of participation. Dole's award-winning float "Preserving Paradise" honored the unsurpassed beauty of Thailand, where Dole grows some of its fruit with responsible, sustainable growing and operating practices.

DREAMERS: Bayer Advanced rose care expert Lance Walheim (left) and his brother, NASA astronaut Rex Walheim, helped decorate the Bayer Advanced "Garden of Imagination" Rose Parade float, and rode the float in the Rose Parade in Pasadena on Jan. 2.

HAPPY TRAILS: The RFD-TV float was a parade finale and a tribute to Roy Rogers, the "King of the Cowboys." It features Trigger and Bullet, and was led by Roy Rogers Riders on 100 golden palominos.

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