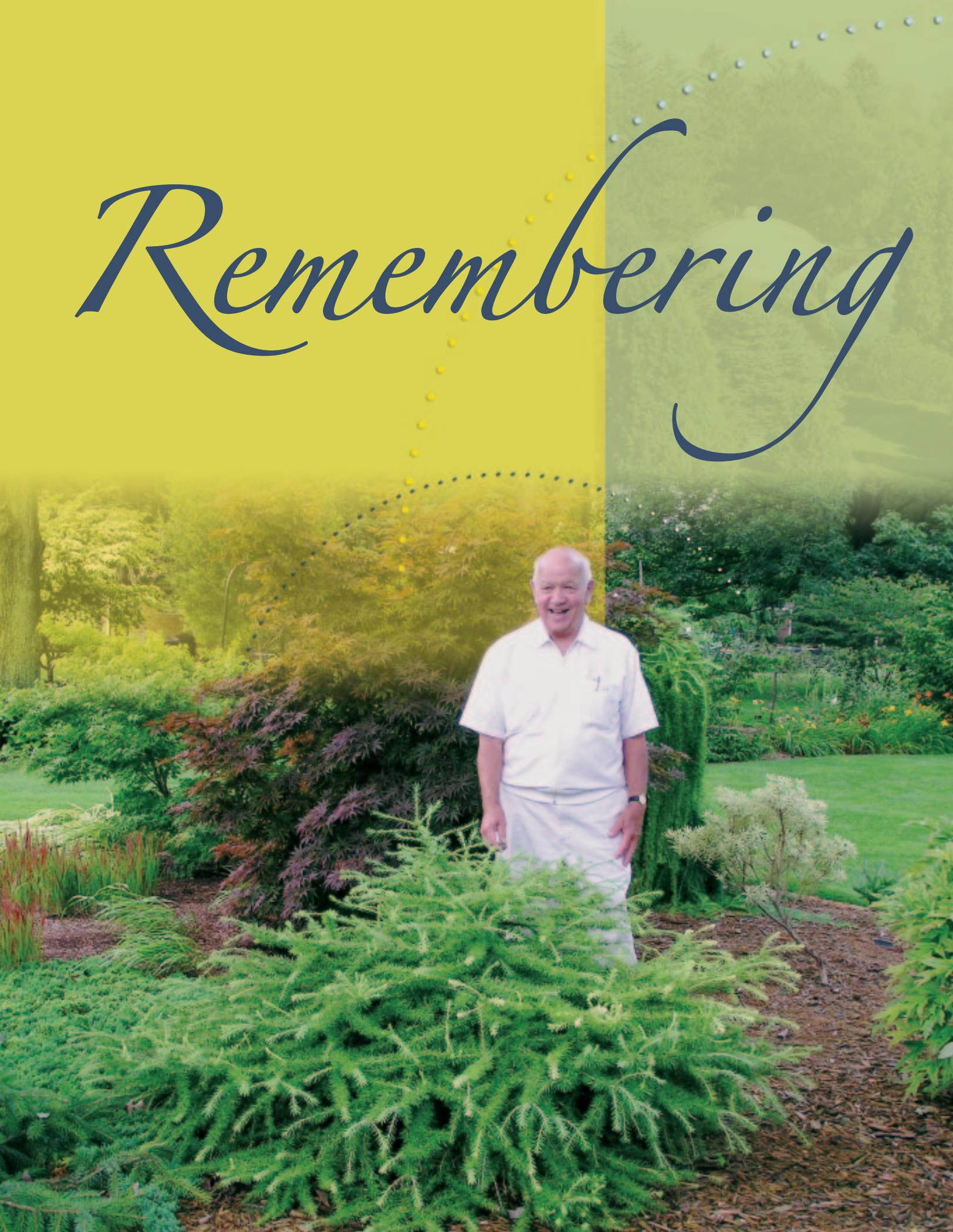
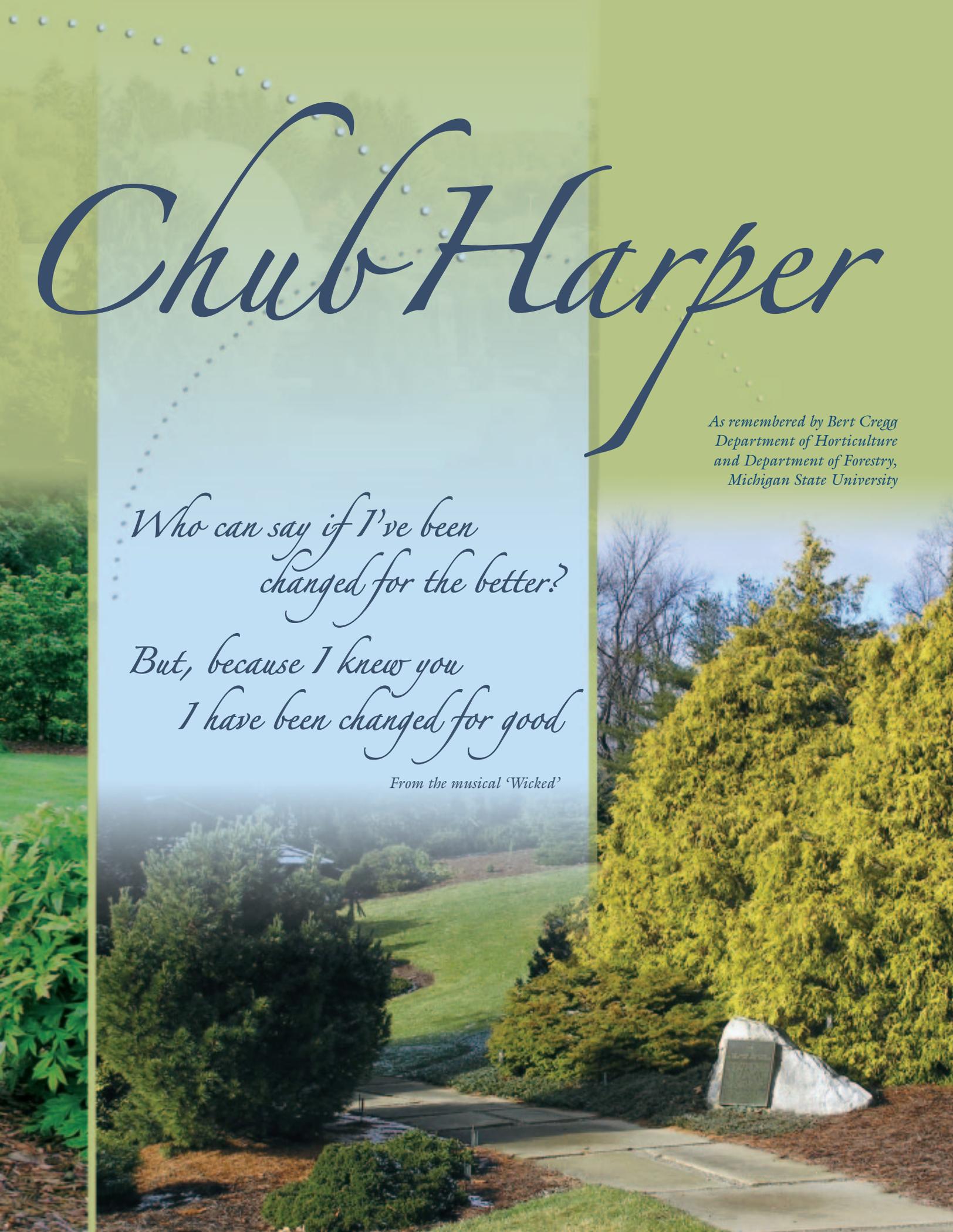


# Remembering





# Chub Harper

*As remembered by Bert Clegg  
Department of Horticulture  
and Department of Forestry,  
Michigan State University*

*Who can say if I've been  
changed for the better?*

*But, because I knew you  
I have been changed for good*

*From the musical 'Wicked'*

*For those of  
us privileged  
to know  
Chub, he was  
the embodiment  
of the word  
'mentor'.*

Justin "Chub" Harper, Moline, IL, died unexpectedly Sunday, March 29, 2009, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Mr. Harper was a long-time plant collector and a premier authority on ornamental conifers. He was a founding member of the American Conifer Society (ACS), where he served as President. In Michigan, Chub is best known for his generous donation of the Harper Collection of Dwarf and Rare Conifers to Michigan State University's Hidden Lake Gardens near Tipton, MI. The Harper Collection, which now includes over 500 specimens, is regarded as one of the finest conifer collections in the world. Chub also was the principal benefactor of the Heartland Collection of Dwarf and Rare Conifers at the Bickelhaupt Arboretum in Clinton, Iowa and he donated 50 rare conifers to the Quad City Botanical Center.

Justin "Chub" Chandler Harper was born July 14, 1928, in Lincoln, Nebraska, the son of Floyd Harper and Eda Kelley. He married Anna Louise Rosane on June 18, 1949 in Lincoln. After his graduation from Lincoln High School, he joined

the United States Marine Corp where he spent his entire tour of duty in North China. In 1952, he graduated from the University of Nebraska with a B.S. degree in agriculture. He was employed as the grounds maintenance supervisor for Deere & Company at the John Deere World Headquarters in 1963. He was awarded the "Grounds Manager of the Year" award in 1983 by the Professional Grounds Management Society. He retired from Deere in 1987, after 24 years of service. He was an avid gardener and plant collector and collected hostas, roses, and African violets, in addition to conifers.

Beyond his horticultural contributions to the conifer community, Chub leaves a lasting legacy in the genuine enthusiasm and passion he shared with the world. For those of us privileged to know Chub, he was the embodiment of the word 'mentor'.

Former ACS President Dennis Groh provides a quintessential Chub story:

*My wife, Carole, and I first met Chub in the parking lot near the Harper Collection. We were brand new ACS members and heard about the conifers at Hidden Lake. After a long day, we were walking back to our car and saw this older gentleman walking out of the visitor's center. At the time, we thought he was a Hidden Lake employee so we stopped him and asked if he had time to answer a few questions about conifers. After he had patiently spent about a half an hour with us, someone who knew him walked by and said, "Chub Harper, I thought you had left a half hour ago to make it back to Moline tonight."*

*At that point, we realized whom we were talking to, we apologized, said we were new ACS members so we hadn't recognized him and excused ourselves so he could leave. He said, "No problem, welcome to the ACS, we'll see you on down the road." We realized that he had severely inconvenienced himself just to be polite to two people he had never met. We were won over by his manner, kindness, and knowledge, which he willingly shared.*

My personal introduction to the Harper Collection came on a visit to Hidden Lake shortly after I joined the MSU Faculty in 1999. Like many, I quickly became fascinated by the incredible array and diversity of plants in the collection. A couple of years later, I met Chub at MNLA's Great Lakes Trade Expo when it was still held in Lansing. At that time, we planted the seeds of what would become the 'Conifer Corner' column, a series of

Back row: Gerry Donaldson, Sam Lovall, Chub Harper, Teresa Holmquist, Jack Wikle, Jon Genereaux  
Front: Carole and Dennis Groh

articles in *The Michigan Landscape* to promote the use of a broad array of conifers in the landscape. Chub was an unending source of information and inspiration for the articles. To develop background information when I was writing, I would call Chub at his home in Moline, put him on speakerphone, throw out a topic (“What to you think about junipers?”), and start taking notes. In 45 minutes to an hour, the article had just about written itself. Several years ago, Chub also began to invite me to tag along on his periodic visits to inspect the Harper Collection. I sometimes felt a bit in over my head wandering the collection with Chub and his conifer posse, but didn’t want to miss the opportunity to walk along side and learn from the master. To state the obvious, Chub taught me a lot about conifers in our interactions. But more importantly, he taught me what real passion and real enthusiasm look like. After each ‘*Conifer Corner*’ appeared in *The Michigan Landscape*, I would get an email from Chub expressing his appreciation of the articles. Whenever I ran into him at a meeting, he would effuse about the latest issue. There are few things that have meant more to me professionally than Chub’s enthusiasm over the ‘*Conifer Corner*’ articles. I will miss the phone calls, I will miss the conifer walks, I will miss the effusive emails and I will miss my friend.



*Note: Memorials may be made to “Michigan State University”, with code No. AB8437 written in the memo area. This signifies the “Harper Endowment Fund” which Chub set up in 1992 to maintain this world class garden.*



Chub and Bert at the Harper Collection



## The world according to Chub.

One of the best things about being around Chub Harper is that he was never at a loss for words. Whether it was opinions on conifers or on the world at large, Chub had a colorful line for every occasion. Here’s a PG-rated sampling of “Chub-isms” compiled by his friend and fellow conifer enthusiast Dennis Groh.

*“Time for a short ride on the chipper truck”*

Used to describe a poorly performing plant about to be removed

*“Hostages”* Hostas

*“Baby broomer”*

A younger ACS member who found their first witches broom

*“I never met a Cembra I didn’t like”*

Describing his fondness for *Pinus cembra*

*“Now that trips my trigger”*

Anything, especially conifers, that got him excited

*“Let’s go get some burnt Angus”*

Time for lunch or dinner (for which he would insist on paying)

*“Doesn’t that pine straw mulch look natural?”*

Describing his fondness for the pine straw he had installed at the conifer collection at Hidden Lake”

*“That guy has his hat wrapped too tight”*

Usually applied to someone with whom Chub disagreed

*“Navi”*

His pet name for his GPS, which he treated as a female that must be obeyed

*“Always avoid winter sun”*

Chub’s advice on choosing sites for hemlocks