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Robert Hillier OBE is Honoured by Industry Award

Robert Hillier OBE, Chairman of the famous Hillier Nurseries and local Garden Centre, has been honoured with a special Industry Award for his Outstanding Contribution to the horticulture sector.

A trophy was presented to Robert at the Industry Awards, hosted by Horticulture Week, at the Grosvenor Hotel, Park Lane, London.

Hillier Nurseries is a family business that has been established for 145 years, with Robert being the 4th generation. When he joined his father, Sir Harold, and brother, John, in 1967 there were 221 staff with a turnover of £300,000.

At the time Robert, with John, took over from his father, the challenge was to transform a much cherished but struggling family business through, often heart-wrenching, rationalisation to a sound and prosperous future. By the time he stepped down as Managing Director last year, he had developed a broad-based business comprising 14 Garden Centres, 2 Trade Cash and Carry Centres, the largest field production tree nursery in the UK, extensive shrub production nursery and one of the largest container tree nurseries in Europe – all contributing to a turnover of around £27m.

During his tenure, the company has maintained its reputation as the nation's leading plants-men and plants-women, introducing more than 100 new plants, developing the award-winning Streetwise Range of Trees, continuing its record-breaking run of Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medals (now 64 consecutively). All this as well as being awarded many prestigious environmental and industry awards.

In parallel with the developments within the family business, Robert has also served the industry in a variety of different ways. He has been the President of the Horticultural Trades Association, he is a former British Commissioner to the Garden Festivals, a former Chairman of the Joint Council for Landscape Industries, he is a trustee and former Treasurer of the Arboricultural Association. His awards have included the Pearson Medal for services to horticulture and an OBE in 2000. In addition to his many important industry roles he has also been a Council Member of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), Chairing its shows committee and more.

Meanwhile, in ambassadorial mode, he plays a leading role in the Greening the Games campaign, helping to ensure UK horticulture gets a proper hearing in the run up to the 2012 Olympics.

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A culmination of his modernisation of the company to make it a truly world class outfit was the award of the Tree Supply Contract to the Olympic Parks for 2012. This was a great success, beating the much fancied, larger European counterparts. This contract is the largest of its kind ever awarded in the UK comprising over 2,000 semi-mature trees (each tree being at least 11 years old).

Supplying Great British Trees to a Great British Games was Robert's ambition once London had won the bid in 2006. He was keen that such a very British industry was well represented on the international stage. This he achieved, and in so doing has helped to raise the profile of the whole UK industry – another factor in the honour bestowed upon him by his peers.

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NOTE TO EDITOR – Please refer to the official London2012 website for information on the Olympic Park tree contract (news archive).