

Memorial for Dr. Bob Norton

By Sam Benowitz

On August 15th I attended the memorial for Dr. Bob Norton at the orchard that Bob founded on Vashon Island where he lived for many years after he retired as the Director of the WSU Mt. Vernon station. He founded the orchard with the Vashon Island Fruit Club.

The club does a great job on the orchard that includes a wide variety of fruit and nut trees, berries and vegetables. It, along with the demonstration garden at the WSU Mt. Vernon station, cultivated by our NW Fruit group volunteers, are both living memorials to Dr. Bob's life.

Bob Baines, our NW Fruit president and I talked with Emily McCrae who is the director of the Vashon orchard and we all agreed to work more closely together on our orchards in honor of Bob.

Bob was born on January 3, 1926 and died on February 3, 2021. He was 95 years old and active until months before his death. Bob's children and their families and Carol Norton, Bob's wife and her family attended the memorial and they gave moving accounts of many things Bob had done with each of them and how much they loved and missed him.

Carol now lives with her daughter and her family on Vashon Island not far from where Bob and Carol lived. A kind horticulturist who lives on Vashon is taking care of the orchard at their home which is now rented.

For those who knew Bob, it is not surprising that rather than fully retire, Bob established amazing orchards at his home and at the Sunrise Ridge orchard. He kept testing many fruit varieties.

It was Dr. Norton who started testing fruit varieties on the edges of the Mt. Vernon station more than 50 years ago. He brought thousands of cultivars from trips around the world to the station. He started to have fruit tastings at the Seattle Center and other locations that were attended by thousands of gardeners. His testing and outreach made the best varieties from around the world to be available to thousands of gardeners in Western Washington.

What Dr. Norton did for fruit growers in Washington is unparalleled. The great array of proven fruit varieties and growing techniques for our unique climate tested for success by Dr. Norton, assisted by Gary Moulton and Jacky King, doesn't exist in other states.

Dr. Norton's family was surprised at how amazing and unusual Bob's contribution to fruit growing was to fruit growers throughout the nation.

We will all miss Dr. Bob's knowledge, kindness and presence at our NW fruit tastings and seminars at the Vernon station that we hope to start back soon after being disrupted by covid.

It is a sad time for all of us following the death's of Bob and Kristan Johnson. We will miss them both so much.



Bob demonstrated pruning at the Winter Field Day