

President's Message, August 2017

Other than the loss of the plums and apricots, my 2017 crop has turned out pretty decent. The peach crop isn't going to break any volume records, but overall the quality has been good. We have had more than our share of rain this summer, which has made brown rot control a challenge on peaches and nectarines. The apples have some russeting from the frosty spring, so the finish isn't perfect, but there is plenty of size to make a good volume crop. Now if my labor just holds out to get them all harvested. Fingers crossed.

Speaking of labor, wouldn't it be amazing if we could replace the worry about finding help to harvest our crops with an automated system? Five years ago when I was giving school tours in the fall a little visitor asked me why we don't have machines to harvest the apples. My response was "There are people working on it, it just hasn't been invented yet." I honestly thought I was speaking about something that would happen in his lifetime, not mine. Now a few years later I can see the potential for this technology to come to fruition in the very near future. In order to work towards more automation in agriculture, Penn State has created and filled two new Ag Engineering positions, one at State College to do research and to educate future graduates, and the other at the fruit research lab in Biglerville to work on field-applied research. I am eager to see what happens in the automation area in the next five years with this new team in place. Maybe one day we will be hiring a small crew to operate a harvesting operation instead of searching for large numbers of physical laborers. I'm sure that harvest technology will just be one part of the research, but this time of the year it seems pretty important.

There are many outstanding fruit growers, marketers and scientists in our industry that I have looked up to and tried to emulate over the years. There are a special few who I put in the Hall of Fame level. (Since I'm a huge baseball fan, I think of them as Hall of Famers (HOF)). If you look in the back of this newsletter at the list of growers who received the Outstanding Grower Award, many of my HOF members are also on that list. I try to model myself in their growing abilities, marketing savvy, leadership, citizenship, and overall fruit grower swagger. As I write this month I have recently learned of the passing of Stan Brown, one of those on my elite HOF list. Stan was a highly influential individual to almost everyone he came in contact with. His personal charisma, intelligence and wisdom has left a distinctive historical impact on our industry. I spend many hours in committee meetings in our industry, and Stan's name has often come up in conversations when we just need "one good idea". As a SHAP board member over the past few years I have spent a lot of time looking at past SHAP committee minutes, and it's amazing how many times his name appears in the notes, even on committees which he was not a member.

Any time you were in Stan's market and spoke with employees you got the sense of a culture where everyone actually wanted to come to work. When I visited Brown's, Stan never came across as the CEO. He was a partner with his employees, bouncing around the store to check on everyone from the department managers to the teenage employee watering the plants. He led by example, and never failed to understand the work that his employees did, from the top down to the lowest rung in his business.

Many years ago I was on a bus tour with the national direct marketing group as they toured Pennsylvania. One of the stops on the tour was Brown's Farm Market. As we boarded the bus after the tour, one of the ladies in front of me was expressing her amazement at what she saw and said "they sure don't do things by the book". And the gentleman behind me said "that's because Stan is writing the book". As the bus pulled out, Stan was in the parking lot waving goodbye. Then I watched as he turned to greet some customers, stooped over to pick up a piece of trash, all while he gathered grocery carts and pushed them back into the market. I think that sums up Stan and his impact on our industry.

My condolences go out to Stan's family, friends and coworkers as they try to fill the void left in their hearts. Stan's legacy is immortalized in my mind as one of the greats, and I put my vote in for his induction into the Fruit Grower Hall of Fame.

Hope you have a bountiful harvest,
Tad

Tad Kuntz
SHAP President