

Pioneer Award 2005

Donnie H. Morris



Donnie H. Morris was known as *the* blueberry industry ambassador, and a void remains since his passing on May 16, 2005. Donnie's company, Baxley Sunbelt Blueberry Corporation, became a member of MBG Marketing/Michigan Blueberry Growers Association in 1983. Donnie was among the original Sunbelt District members in MBG and was a strong supporter and faithful advocate of the Association through speech and actions. Donnie served on MBG's board of directors from 1990-1995 and again from 1997-98. He served as

both Treasurer and Vice-President during his board tenure and in several other appointed or elected leadership positions during his membership.

Donnie's national light really began to shine as he stepped up his involvement in the North American Blueberry Council (NABC) and in the early development of the United States Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC), the blueberry industry's research and promotion program. At the NABC, Donnie served on the finance, industry relations, legislative, and nominations committees over the years. He then served as the Georgia state representative on the USHBC board from its inception in 2001 until his death. Donnie also served on the executive committees of both organizations and was a past president of the NABC and Vice-Chairman of the USHBC when he passed away much too early at age 63. Just last winter, Donnie's industry contributions were recognized by the NABC presentation of the Alex Weatherbee Award.

Donnie knew how to make things happen and the USHBC would not have evolved to its present successful state without his tireless efforts. He loved people and offered a wide smile to everyone he met, making an acquaintance into a friend in no time. He could diffuse any tense situation with humor and was the first to

offer a joke when others were retreating. A quote from his memorial service said, "He was a builder, a planner, a risk taker, and he had the ability to get things done." Everyone affiliated with Donnie through MBG, NABC, or USHBC would agree with all those descriptive terms.

Donnie leaves a long legacy of involvement in community and other agricultural related organizations. He was a lifelong resident of Appling County, Georgia and was a member of the Exchange Club and a Leadership of Georgia Alumnus. Donnie was chairman of the finance committee of the Asbury United Methodist Church and a founding director of the G. Ross Freeman Foundation, a leadership program for United Methodist men. His agricultural advocacy included not only his blueberry affiliations, but serving on the Research and Development Advisory Board of the University of Georgia and the board of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

Donnie is survived by his wife, Jane; a son, Michael Morris (Dessa); a daughter, Pam Dewitt (Randy); several grandchildren; a sister, Kathy; and a brother, Mickey. Jane is continuing on for Donnie at Baxley Sunbelt with the help of the loyal blueberry team Donnie developed. We know it will never be the same, but Donnie, as a true leader, set the stage for success, and Jane and the staff carried on admirably this first difficult season without him.

From a 1992 autobiography found in MBG's archives, Donnie summed up his abilities by saying, "I feel I have the ability to admire, but not envy - to follow, but not imitate- to praise, but not flatter- to lead, but not manipulate - to always listen and hear." We couldn't agree more, which is why MBG Marketing posthumously presents its prestigious Pioneer Award to Donnie Morris.