

PRESENTATION OF A SPECIAL AWARD TO W. H. BROKAW



I am privileged to present to an extraordinary individual a token uniquely symbolizing the esteem in which he is held by his peers.

I would *like* to share with you for half an hour or so the reasons this honoree so richly deserves the award to be conferred.

I would *like* you to know of the vastness of his knowledge and wisdom.

You *should be* told in some detail about his many contributions, tangible and intangible, toward advancement of the avocado industry worldwide as a valuable nutritional resource.

You should be made aware of his inventive genius... his vision. .. and his notable accomplishments in and out of his profession.

You *should be* given clues to the depth and the complexity of this remarkable human being.

Unfortunately for my wishes, time is not available to do all of that. I have been allotted about five minutes into which to compress a biographical sketch.

Our honoree is Hank Brokaw, founding owner of Brokaw Nursery, Inc. His name is among the best known in the California avocado industry... as well as in the other countries of the international avocado industry. William Henley Brokaw is a native son of California, born in Whittier. After attending Whittier Union High School and Fullerton Junior College, he entered Harvard University in 1949 and earned an A. B. degree. From there he went on to the University of Chicago for a Masters degree.

While at Chicago, Hank met fellow student Ellen McGiffert. In 1964, smart fellow that he is, he married her. In the course of time, the couple produced five children. They are still married.

Hank studied anthropology in Chicago "to [in his words] be useful in solving problems for other people with other cultures... in a period of rapid social and technical change." After graduating, however, Hank decided instead to come back to California, to UCLA, to prepare for teaching in the secondary school system. For ten years, he taught math and sciences at Ojai and Ventura High School before deciding on a major career change. I believe he still is a "teacher," though now unofficially and without a paycheck. The change was motivated by his avocational interest in growing avocado, citrus, and kiwifruit nursery plants. It pointed toward a life occupation that should have certain characteristics that he described as:

- A. Coordinated endeavor of head and hand
- B. Unstructured path to stability or success
- C. An element of risk
- D. A requirement for imagination and new approaches

The Brokaw Nursery was born when Hank and Ellen bought 500 avocado seeds and grew them in their back yard. With \$ 1,500 from Hank's cashed war bonds and an equal loan from Ellen's parents, the Brokaws bought an acre of land and planted about 80

avocado trees to found their nursery. In the interest of time, I shall simply say that the rest of the nursery story is history — a history with downs and ups and the overall success that ultimately was the result of vision, faith, hard work, and persistence.

Hank's interest in agriculture was not from some epiphany. His father had grown orchards and a nursery. His uncle was the early-days prominent Whittier avocado nurseryman, A. R. Rideout. A cousin was Harold H. Brokaw, the Whittier avocado nurseryman who was the principal promoter of the Hass variety in its early history. A relative by marriage was Vista's well-known avocado nurseryman Arthur G. Hazzard, who was eventually succeeded by his son-in-law Noel Walker, and he thereafter by Walker's son-in-law Bob Vice, who now heads the California Farm Bureau. You may need a genealogy chart to sort out all of that, but I think it suggests that the Brokaw tribe, now headed by Hank, knows more than a thing or two about the avocado nursery business.

Hank holds membership in several agriculture-oriented organizations. He has been a member of this one for forty years — during many of them as a member of our board. He has served twice as the Society's president — in 1973 and 1974, and in 1986 and 1987. He has twice been awarded the Society's Medal of Honor — one of only six individuals ever so recognized. And he is one of the only two living persons holding the honorary title of *Director Emeritus* of this Society. Apparently having time on his hands, he also serves as a founding leader of the World Avocado Society.

I have no idea how many Brokaw-grown avocado trees have been planted throughout our global industry, but the number must be huge. One could surmise that the Brokaws' net worth should approximate Microsoft's Bill Gates's fortune, had not Hank and Ellen been so generous with their little-known gifts to others of dollars and nursery plants and their time.

There is much more that could be told, but unfortunately there is no more time to continue the tale. We must move on.

I would like Mr. Brokaw now to come forward to receive from the Society's Varieties and Nurserymen's Committee this rarely-to-be-given award that has affectionately been authorized by his admiring peers.

Remarks of Jack Shepherd, CAS *Director Emeritus*