



In Memoriam

SO LONG, RALPH PINKERTON

Mark Affleck

President and CEO, California Avocado Commission

Ralph Pinkerton, one of the great pioneers of the California avocado industry, died at his home in Newport Beach, California on December 28, 2004. He was 84 years old.

Ralph played a pivotal role in the development of the modern avocado industry. He was the only president of the California Avocado Advisory Board and guided the early years of the California Avocado Commission (CAC). He was a marketing genius who took little-known California avocados from farm stands and a few small retail stores in California to the produce shelves of every leading supermarket in the U.S.

Ralph's career was marked by a long list of "firsts":

- **THE FIRST** to use a celebrity in produce advertising with a picture of leotard-clad Angie Dickinson holding up an avocado slice (which took a record week to shoot.) Ribbed later about the extraordinarily long photo session, Pinkerton maintained he just wanted to "get the right angle" of the sex symbol star of *Police Woman*;
- **THE FIRST** to assemble America's leading nutritionists to research the benefits of eating California avocados, which resulted in the American Heart Association taking avocados off its "no " list and placing them on its "okay-to-eat" list;

- **THE FIRST** to create consumer advertising campaigns in cooperation with leading food companies like Kraft Foods and Frito Lay in order to stretch advertising dollars;
- **THE FIRST** to do radio tie-ins;
- **THE FIRST to** combine outdoor billboards with radio ads;
- **THE FIRST** to tie recipes to promotions;
- **THE FIRST** to conduct retail trade dinners;
- **THE FIRST** (and last!) to employ parachuting sheep to attract attention to the Washington State Fair in the late 1940's.

Born April 3, 1920 in Spokane, Washington. Ralph worked in the produce industry up until the last few months of his life. He was charismatic, innovative and driven to succeed at selling produce with passion. He was the life of the party always singing and playing the piano. His favorite recreations were fine dining, listening to jazz music, fishing, camping and being with family and friends. Ralph had an amazing gift of telling stories. He drove fancy cars and wore classy clothes. That was his impeccable style.

Ralph attended Lewis & Clark High School in Spokane, Washington, then moved on to the University of Idaho, where he was in the Phi Delta Theta fraternity. He later served in the United States Navy in World War II as a Lieutenant Navy Bomber Pilot. Soon after the service Ralph married Joy Shinkoskey Hewett.

He learned his first marketing skills from the Fuller Brush Company, worked for the Washington State Apple Commission, then formed his own apple brokerage firm called Firman-Pinkerton in Wenatchee, Washington. He moved to California in the early 1960's and worked 23 years as CAC's Founding President & Chief Executive Officer. For such efforts, Pinkerton was named THE PACKER'S Marketer of the Year in 1973.

But there was more than marketing genius to Pinkerton. He cared about and served his industry, from helping found what has become the Fresh Produce & Floral Council, including a stint as its President, to Chairing the Produce Marketing Association.

He was warm and tough.. a throwback to the John Wayne era. When he said it was time to take the beach, everyone took the beach.

Ralph is survived by his four children and their spouses; Pam and Alex McGeary, Scott and Carol Pinkerton, Deborah and Bret Hewitt, Jane and Jim Carlyle. His four grandchildren and their spouses; Jennifer and Jim Ogawa, Jeffrey Pinkerton, Matthew Carlyle, Jeffrey Carlyle. His three great grandchildren; Brittany Bates, Haley Bates and Tyler Pinkerton.

So long, Ralph, you left a mark on our industry that will endure forever.