



Award of Special Merit

Steve Peirce

Lake Elsinore, CA

Award presented by Len Francis

Occasionally, the Avocado Society gives an Award of Special Merit. It is given to a person whose efforts have been of benefit to the avocado industry over an extended period of time. Today we recognize someone who has been a problem solver for our industry whenever he was needed. The Society's Award of Special Merit goes to Steve Peirce.

When our groves were under quarantine from the Mexican or Mediterranean fruit fly, and we needed to know what had to be done to be able to harvest and sell our fruit, more than likely we heard Steve at an industry meeting explaining how, and what, and why.

At those times when a newly introduced pest, such as the Persea mite, or a new to science pest such as the Avocado thrips – times when there was no awareness, no detection techniques, no known chemical controls, and no regulations in place – Steve was there to help growers find solutions.

I met Steve when he was an employee of Sun World, where he was a field representative at the Irvine Ranch. When the Mediterranean fruit fly broke loose in the Corona/Riverside area, Steve was there. When the Persea mite found its way up from Mexico, Steve was a field representative for Calavo. As the mite was defoliating our trees, a task force was formed, and we met at Calavo's office in Temecula. Steve volunteered to take notes. The group included entomologists,

PCA's, the CAS Research Coordinator, insectary owners and a University of California expert on biological control. All of us wanted a non-chemical answer, a predator or parasite that could be reared and released throughout the avocado orchards. Steve became the glue for this effort. Questions arose about which insectary could raise the best beneficials, who would pay for it, how would they be field tested. Things kept moving and meetings were held where Steve reminded us of who said what about what they would do and when they would do it. It was a huge workload. Ultimately we got the predators – *Galendromus annectans*, *G. helvelolas*, and *N. californicus* – and they were successful.

These were Steve's beginnings into industry service. The California Avocado Commission began contracting with Steve to find, solve, perform, and coordinate several programs. He did groundwork for special-use pesticide registration to control Avocado thrips. He helped secure a crop insurance program for avocados. He held many meetings to explain this program and later stood with growers to improve it.

Steve contributed to the annual industry crop estimates, as well as estimates of damage from wind and cold weather. He was always supplying answers to us – the growers. He was also successful at finding the right help. He once said, "I am not an expert. I find and work with those who are." This is an example of his humility.

Steve did all these programs while establishing his own consulting company. He was meticulous with details, he sought and provided useful information, and his clients were the beneficiaries.

He was 55 years old when he passed away almost a year ago. He had been working diligently to construct the 2007 crop estimate after what had been a very difficult year for many growers.

Steve will always be loved by his daughter Jessica, his son Ryan, and by his beloved wife of twenty years, Barbara. Barbara is attending the wedding of a good friend today. She asked me to read her letter to you all.

I want to tell you that Steve loved his work more than you will ever know, and that was because you respected, appreciated, supported, and encouraged him every step of the way.

I don't think there is any industry or commodity anywhere that would have allowed Steve to have the opportunities he had in the California avocado industry. You always made him feel he was making a difference, and I will always be grateful to you for that. I am also grateful that you are allowing me to continue some of the work Steve and I did together and remain a part of what I have come to view as a great, extended family.

I will always consider Steve to have been a "quietly" extraordinary man. I was truly blessed to have been his partner for twenty years.

At the end of it all, I think if people say about you that you were a kind and gentle person who had a good heart, you have lived a good life. Steve lived a good life.