

**2010 Oliver Atkins Award
of Excellence**
Brandon McKee
Riverside, California



Award presented
by Greg Douhan

I take great pleasure in announcing that this year's Oliver Atkins Award of Excellence has been given to Brandon McKee. This is a very prestigious award given by the California Avocado Society to honor a person or family who has worked diligently to advance the avocado industry. Over the years, this award has been given to people involved in the industry from volunteers to academics, and from growers to nurserymen. This year's inductee, Brandon McKee, is the first research technician to receive this great honor. I feel he is very deserving of this recognition due to his tireless work in avocado research, and in particular, to his contributions in the area of developing avocado rootstocks with tolerance to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Brandon was born in Los Angeles but moved to Riverside as a child and has resided there ever since. His mother Virginia married UCR Plant Pathologist Howard Ohr when Brandon was 12, which introduced him to the world of agricultural research early in his life. Brandon graduated from Poly High School in 1991 but started working for UCR at the age of 16, at which time he developed his love for research and began honing his interest in botany. After High School in 1992, he started working for Dr. Carol Lovatt in the Botany and Plant Sciences Department working on citrus and avocado projects. In 1994 he was persuaded by Dr. John Menge to join his research team and by 1996, he became the lead field technician responsible for the rootstock breeding program, and remains so today.

Many of you in this audience know Brandon. Any growers that have worked with the rootstock breeding program over the years also know Brandon very well. Those of you who have worked with Brandon know how committed he is to his work, and that he always does whatever it takes to get the job done. He will plant the trees himself or collect and weigh fruit during harvest if problems arise with grove hands not being available, a situation that inevitably happens due to the nature of field based research. To his credit, he does this without complaining or showing discontent, truly demonstrating his amazing work ethic and his easy-going personality. I have had the pleasure to know and work with Brandon for the last five years and reiterate that without his knowledge and commitment as a staff research associate, my job in taking over the rootstock-breeding program as the lead principal investigator could have been extremely difficult. With Brandon's help, as well as help from another long-time employee of UCR, Elinor Pond, we have been working hard as a team in moving the rootstock breeding program forward for the avocado growers of this state.

Next, I would just like to touch upon some personal notes regarding Brandon. He is one of those very unassuming people who is always very quiet. In fact, I've joked with other people in the lab that you might never know that Brandon is even in the room. But while quiet, he is colorful due to his many tattoos, including his famous avocado tattoo, which has earned him the nick name 'Mr. Avocado' by some of his friends. I know Brandon enjoys his work because he has always loved the great outdoors, including camping, fishing, and hunting. Brandon was also a serious cyclist who trained twice at the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, where raced with and against Lance Armstrong! While he loves bikes, his first love has always been automobiles, including his favorite 1967 Mustang that he restored with his father. Brandon has a beautiful daughter, Ivy Rose, and was married last May to Julie Davis. When Brandon is not working hard in the field, you may find him at home working on his various art projects. Finally, if you are out and about on the weekend you may also see Brandon pursuing another one of his passions, cruising on the open road on his motorcycle.

Brandon, please come up and except this wonderful recognition for your work in helping the California avocado industry. You are the deserving recipient of the 2010 Oliver Atkins Award of Excellence.