New Jersey News

Remembering Dr. Richard Merritt

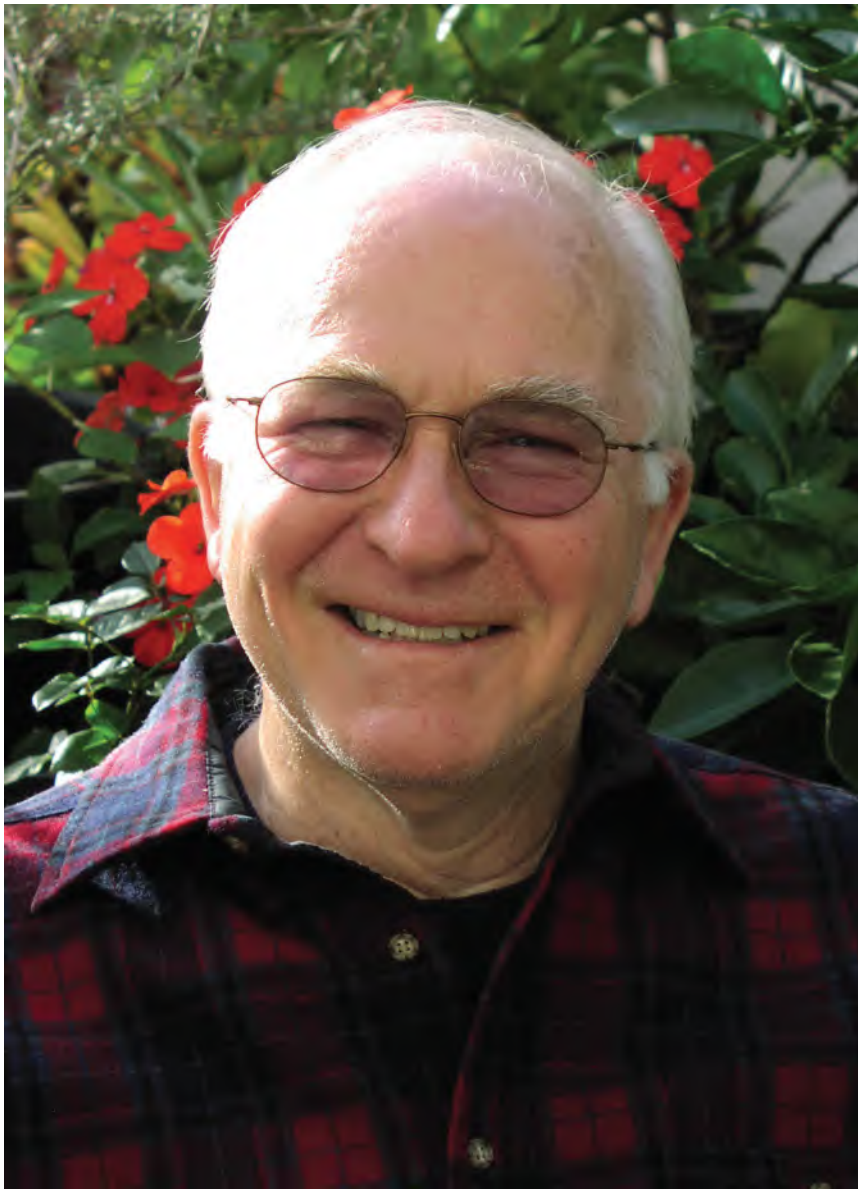
Win Cowgill

My friend, mentor and colleague Dr. Richard (Dick) Merritt passed away October 30, 2011. I miss him greatly. Many in the horticulture profession new Dr. Merritt, he was an institution at Cook College, Rutgers University for over 60 years. He trained and influenced 1000's of students in his career and positively impacted 100's of New Jersey Farmers through his efforts as well.

As the youngest Dean of Students in the Country at Cook College, Rutgers, in the 1970's, Dick was the driving force behind the development of the institution we new to become Cook College. I first worked with Dick in the 1980's when we worked on key committee together to shape the future of Cook College and our NJ Agricultural Experiment station. We became friends and colleagues. He really served as one of the few mentors in my life that guided me through much of my career at Rutgers. In many ways he was like a dad to me, always knowing the right questions to ask and always had the best advice when needed, on life issues as well as work. Many times he would just talk and talk, but was ok, he was opinionated and had his own view of the world but I found myself agreeing with it most of the time!

I remember when he proofed a paper of mine in 1993, he figured out I had dyslexia- I have struggled with this reading and writing disorder all my life, but he is the first one that told me what it was...Amazing, I was 42 before I learned what I had, thanks to Dick.

He was an avid gardener and horticulturist. I gave him many fruit trees over the years and we was glad to



have my advice on their cultivation, even thought he still considered himself a pomologist.

He often invited me over for dinner, I still wonder if he told Bonnie I was coming many times, but we always enjoyed excellent home cooking and lively conversation.

I will let the others fill in some blanks about Dick Merritt.

Memorial Service

At a memorial service in January, 2012 may of his friends and coworkers gathered to remember him, here are some excerpts from their remarks.

Dan Rossi: Dick Merritt will be remembered for many and varied accomplishments. He was an outstanding and motivating teacher, a creative and accomplished researcher, an experienced and dedicated mentor and advisor who knew when to be brutally frank to make sure his advisees achieved their potential, a visionary and inspiring dean, a innovative and internationally recognized developer of curricula, a loyal and passionate son of Rutgers, a patriotic and committed citizen, and a loving and selfless husband, father, and friend. He along with Charlie Hess played an instrumental role in the conceptualization and development of Cook College. Perhaps lesser known were his roles in organizing the Cook alumni and parents into strong advocates for the college and the university.

Dick was influential in raising tens of thousands of dollars in support of other scholarship funds at Rutgers. He had a positive influence on literally thousands of Rutgers students during his over 50 years as a Rutgers Professor. His impact, however, continued well beyond graduation. He successfully engaged hundreds of alumni to remain active and contributing members of the Rutgers community. He was also the primary reason why Rutgers cooperative living alumni have contributed towards the largest undergraduate scholarship endowment fund at Cook College. The endowment currently totals over $2 million and supports 38 cooperative living students at $2,200 per student per year.

For those who knew Dick Merritt well, you know that there were two very different sides to this very complex man. There was a public side. Dick was the ultimate professional. However, he could be rough and tough when necessary. He had little patience for B.S. He had the ability to cut to the chase in meetings. And it did not matter if you were a university president,

dean, faculty member or student. As you know, Dick definitely had his view of the world.

But there was a private side to Dick that if you were fortunate you got a chance to experience. Dick was caring and compassionate. He was there so many times of challenges in my life. And it was not necessary to go to him. He would seek me out when he heard I needed help.

Charlie Hess: It's hard to summarize 61 years of close working relationships and deep friendship, 'but I would like to share with you a few of my memories. Dick and I first met in 1950 as Rutgers undergraduates in Plant Science in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES). We were reunited in 1966 when I returned to Rutgers as Chair of the Department of Horticulture and Forestry by which time Dick had become Associate Dean and Director of Resident lnstruction. This began a period in which the professional and personal interactions with Dick grew and matured into one of the deepest friendships I have experienced.

A major activity was working together with the faculty of CAES to develop a new concept for the college focusing on people and the environment and the challenges for agriculture in the nation's most urban state. Dick took the lead in developing the curriculum for the new college. The result was Cook College, a self-contained college with its own majors and dorms and programs that integrated student life and academic

programs. Cook College became one of the most popular colleges on the New Brunswick Campus of Rutgers University. Without Dick's leadership Cook College would not have been a reality. Dick Merritt was a preeminent leader in academic administration.

ln all of the many shared experiences - professional and personal the characteristic of Dick's that I remember the most was his self confidence. Dick was never ambivalent, and he was always sure that he was right. And, in fact, he usually was!

Roger Locandro: My brother Ron said it best, 'He was a great man and he did something good for the world!'

When Dick began as the director of Resident Instruction at Cook, later, Academic Dean, he was a young man and the College of Agriculture had about 370 students. Aggies- When he completed his mission, there were over 3,000 students, new dorms, this beautiful campus center, a modern recreation facility and active parents and alumni associations- plus a growing number of graduate students and faculty, and a redefined mission for Cook College.

His special place was in the garden; the greater garden of life, the source of the greater good that he preformed. It is all there, light, soil, water, air peace and solitude. A good place for life and seeking who we are and what we are about.

Dean Polk, Statewide Tree Fruit IPM Agent, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Rutgers University, presented "New Problem Insect Pests: A Preview from Down South" to the Annual Summer Meeting of the Massachusetts Fruit Growers' Association. The meeting was held on July 16, 2012, at the UMass Cold Spring Orchard Research & Education Center. Left photo: Dean Polk discussing spotted-wing drosophila. Right photo: left to right, Wes Autio (UMass Professor of Pomology and Director of the Stockbridge School of Agriculture), Dean Polk, and Jon Clements (UMass Tree-fruit Extension Educator).

Thomas "Dick" Battaglia Passes

Thomas "Dick" Battaglia, age 86, of Hammonton, passed away Monday, March 12, 2012 at his residence. Born in Hammonton, he founded in 1980 and was the president of Hammonton Package Sales Co. Inc. Dick was president of the National Peach Council, member of New Jersey Farm Bureau, New Jersey Vegetable Growers Assn., Hammonton Exchange Club. Dick was selected as parishioner of the year at St. Anthony of Padua Church.

Dick is predeceased by his wife Virginia and his son in law Donald Leadley. Surviving are his daughter Virginia Leadley-Flukey and her husband Stephen of Dorchester and his son Richard Battaglia and his wife Beverly of Georgia. Brother in law to Anna Battaglia. Loving grandfather of Donald Leadley and his wife Marianne, Jonel Leadley, Leanne Leadley, Kellie Almond, and Monique Devers and great-grandfather of 10.

Donations may be made to St. Joseph High School Education Fund, 101 Central Ave. Hammonton, NJ 08037.

(Published in Courier-Post on March 14, 2012.)

Photo Caption for New Jersey Section- Vergers (Orchards) Gerald and Paul Lussier, Franklin Center, Quebec, Canada- Gerald Lussier, Win Cowgill and Paul Lussier tour the Lussier orchards on the 2012 - International Fruit Tree Association (IFTA) summer tour. One hundred and eighty growers, extension workers, nurserymen and researchers were welcomed to Quebec for the third time in the last 30 years to learn about their industry.

Dedicated to the Orderly Marketing and Promotion of New Jersey Peaches

New NJ Peach Buyers Guide Dedicated to Al Caggiano

Clayton, NJ. The 2012 New Jersey Peach Buyers Guide is now available to all interested in the New Jersey Peach industry and those buying New Jersey peaches. "This year's 72 page guide is dedicated to Mr. Alfred Caggiano, owner of Sunny Slope Farms in Bridgeton," said Santo John Maccherone, Chair of the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council, publisher of the guide. "The Sunny Slope Brand is emblematic of the highest quality Jersey Fresh peaches," said Mr. Maccherone. "Mr. Caggiano's leadership in the peach industry and his goal of marketing the premium quality peaches has set the bar high for all of us attempting to market the best fruit," said Maccherone. Sunny Slope is currently managed by Mr. Caggianos family packing and distributing white and yellow fleshed peaches and nectarines out of their modern facility in Bridgeton, New Jersey

"The 2012 guide lists in alphabetical order growers and shippers of New Jersey peaches including their brands, and general information on what and how they ship," states Jerry Frecon, Agricultural Agent with Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension. "This section has been completely rewritten for easier use and placement on the New Jersey Peaches web site at www.jerseypeaches.com, and an updated list of direct marketers and community farmer's market members selling New Jersey peaches is also included in the guide" said Frecon, editor of the publication.

Over the years the guide has been an important source of information for the media because it provides details and statistics on the peach industry. Color pictures of some of the most important varieties are highlighted along with details on when they are available for buyers. Other statistics and a history of the NJ Peach Industry are provided.

Information is included on the Jersey Fresh Promotional program for peaches and the Quality-grading program run by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Details on officers and directors of the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council are listed along with an outline of plans for the 2012 promotional program on peaches.

For merchandisers the guide contains information on how to store and handle New Jersey peaches; flavor, quality and hydrocooling, and food safety procedures for New Jersey handlers.

The opening page of the guide explains why everyone should buy New Jersey Peaches. Buying New Jersey peaches helps to preserve peach farms and open space in the Garden State.

Information on procuring the guide can be obtained by contacting info@jerseypeaches.com or by writing the New Jersey Peach Promotion Council at 1200 North Delsea Drive, Clayton, N.J. 08312 or 856 307-6456.

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