

# A *Fruit Notes* Issue in Honor of Ronald J. Prokopy

Wesley R. Autio

*Department of Plant, Soil, & Insect Sciences, University of Massachusetts*

I still have a hard time believing that we have lost our friend and colleague Ron Prokopy in May, 2004. His contribution to the science and practice of apple pest management will never be forgotten.

Ron Prokopy was the entomological side of the UMass Fruit Program. He contributed regularly to *Fruit Notes*, *Healthy Fruit*, and the *New England Apple Pest Management Guide*. He wrote twenty-six *Annual March Messages*, an update on the state of tree-fruit insect control for fruit growers, and he spoke at all but three or four of the nearly 60 Twilight

Grower Meetings since I joined the faculty 19 years ago. Further, he was always available to assist growers with their problems. This tally, however, does not adequately capture how Ron extended the research of UMass to the fruit industry. His outreach efforts were borne from a deep-seated concern for the well being of the tree-fruit industry and the growers as individuals and from an unquenchable enthusiasm for the details of insect pest management. He understood the constraints imposed on farmers both by the natural world and by society. This understanding helped Ron mold



his outreach to guide our tree-fruit industry to a level which put them among the most progressive pest managers in the World.

This extremely effective outreach effort was supported by one of the most productive research programs in the University. With hundreds of research articles to his credit, Ron Prokopy was one of the most respected entomological scientists in the World. He helped mold the concepts which are the foundation of current and future integrated pest management (IPM). It was both remarkable and inspirational how his research spanned the spectrum from basic to applied. All his research, even the most fundamental, was clearly focused on solving a practical problem.

There are many examples of how Ron brought his research and outreach together, but I particularly enjoyed his talk at one of our twilight meetings a few years ago. Plum curculio is one of the most difficult pests for orchardists and scientists alike. Ron focused much of the last 10 years on this troublesome insect. He spent much time watching and recording curculio movement into and around apple trees. At a mid-June twilight meeting, Ron spent a good portion of his 20 minutes (which usually lasted at least 40 minutes) describing how curculios found an apple tree. This talk was given mostly from the orchard floor, that is Ron was lying down and crawling along the ground (and speaking) showing the growers how the curculio saw the world. This enthusiasm for the actions of plum curculio, and also for apple maggot flies, gave Ron the ability make great strides in research, interpret those results, and develop and transfer the knowledge nec-

essary to help growers.

Members of the Fruit Program cooperate on a number of fronts, from research to educational programs, but we are always together at nine twilight grower meetings per year (three series of three meetings each). For at least one of each of these series over the last several years, three or four of us would travel together. This trip usually was to Plymouth County, Bristol County, or Rhode Island and was as much as a two-hour ride from Amherst. We always had to study the weather forecast before heading that way with Ron. If it was going to be hot (and Ron loved hot, humid weather), we tried to get the largest vehicle available, usually a van. Most of us enjoy the benefits of automotive air conditioning in hot weather, but not Ron. The large vehicle allowed us to make him ride in the far back, away from the air conditioning and near his own open window. Some of Ron's other eccentricities included power naps, eating a head of lettuce for supper, re-viewing papers while driving, and his numerous pillows, sweaters, and bags that always traveled with him. These "quirks" punctuated his honest and unwavering concern for people. He cared about all of us, growers, students, colleagues, and friends.

This issue of *Fruit Notes* is dedicated to Ron's memory. It begins with a few memories of Ron and ends with the last three articles that he wrote for *Fruit Notes* (in the few weeks before his death, thanks to Isabel Jácome for typing these articles).

Ron Prokopy was an amazing individual. He was among the best scientists, the best extension educators, and the best people that we will ever know.

