

Bill Bonneywell

2012 Inductee

Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers Hall of Fame

Many of us in Wenatchee met Bill Bonneywell years ago since he traveled to Wenatchee to judge our shows. As a long-time friend of Tony DeRooy, Bill was always willing to hop in his car and drive over the pass to help us out at our annual show. His attitude was always gracious, and he left the impression that we were doing him a favor to allow him to come over and spend a couple days with us here on the dry side of the Cascades. He and Ida were always so kind and helpful to us as we have worked to raise the level of quality of our flowers.

As the originator of Snoho dahlias, Bill has won many awards for his blooms, with Snoho Doris a perennial member of the ADS Fabulous 50. Personally, I really loved one of Bill's last seedlings, Snoho Monika, a pretty little deep red stellar. I can only imagine how Bill's heart must have almost burst with pride when his grandson Richard Johnson came home with the 2010 Stanley Johnson award for his cultivar, Midnight Star. I'm sure that Richard, and others who have gardened alongside Bill have benefited greatly from his mentorship and generosity.

We lost Bill at the end of last year, following a lengthy and debilitating illness. I was both honored and saddened to receive Richard's phone call the morning that Bill died. He must have known how much we had come to love his grandpa here in North Central Washington, and this was indeed a personal loss for us. As lovely as so many of his cultivars were and are, there was so much more to Bill than just his skill and his love for our favorite flower. It was his ongoing commitment to us, to his clubs and to dahlia growers statewide. I will always remember the last time I saw him, when he showed up at Snohomish County's show in 2011. He greeted me from his wheelchair with a huge warm Bonneywell hug, and as he pulled away, tears were rolling down his face. He said, "This is the first show season that I haven't been able to judge." He was heartbroken that he couldn't join in and do what had become second nature to him. My reassurance that the most important thing was for him to get better was cold comfort to this dear man whose life had come to revolve around his work with dahlias, judging and mentorship. He hugged me again as he left to visit with others, and I said goodbye with a heavy heart.

Bill embodied the hardworking spirit that personifies the character of the dahlia grower. Although my knowledge of Bill is nowhere near as comprehensive as those who have worked with him in Snohomish County and in the Federation, what little I know is enough.

I am privileged to enter his name as a Nominee for the NW Federation 2012 Hall of Fame.

Written by Linda DeRooy Holmes-Cook