

## **STEVE AND SANDY BOLEY**

### **2020 Nominees**

#### **Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers Hall of Fame**

When Steve bought a house in Seattle in the late 1980s it came complete with dahlias. After his marriage to Sandy, a Master Florist, the transition to dahlia fanatics was somehow inevitable. And then they joined the Puget Sound Dahlia Association and things quickly got out of hand.

They purchased five acres of land near Ferndale, Washington in 1995 so they could grow more dahlias -- and since they both worked in the Seattle area, commuted to their dahlia farm (100 miles one way) on weekends. While they both enjoyed exhibiting dahlias, they soon discovered that dahlia hybridization was challenging and rewarding.

Not content to simply gather seeds and see what happened, they delved into color theory, dahlia hybridization assumptions, and dahlia growth habits. They learned that much dahlia "knowledge" was merely old wives' tales passed down through the ages. They set out to rewrite the book.

Inveterate investigators, they read everything about dahlia hybridization they could get their hands on and talked to those having success – both in the US and overseas. They experimented and they wrote. Soon *Dahlias of Today* was blessed with articles from Steve and Sandy about dahlia genetics, dahlia hybridization, and seedling selection.

Steve was employed in sales while the couple was living in Seattle. This gave him less time to devote to dahlia hybridization -- that is, until they purchased the Ferndale property and began to raise more dahlias there. Initially, the Boleys focused on pompon hybridization, a form they thought could use some new variety. But soon they found success with waterlily dahlias, beginning with Sandia Shomei. Then again, they found success with miniature ball dahlias like SB's Sunny and Ms Kennedy. Their breeding success rests on a determined plan to isolate seed parents by planting candidates in separate plots at some distance from each other.

The Boleys transitioned through the Federation judging program and became respected senior judges. They were soon tapped to help teach and are currently instructors of the Federation's accredited to senior classes. In addition, they have presented at numerous Federation workshops through the years.

When *Dahlias of Today* editors decided to run a series articles, each focused on judging a certain type of dahlia, Steve and Sandy were tapped to write the first in the series – on judging anemone dahlias. That article has become the model for all following in the series – and the Boleys have continued to contribute (for instance, see "Judging Ball, Miniature Ball, and Pompon Dahlias" in *Dahlias of Today 2019*.)

But wait, there's more. Sandy noticed that many Federation clubs were having trouble lining up garden club judges to evaluate the arrangement sections at their shows. As a result, many clubs were calling on Federation members to judge the arrangements – with varying degrees of reliability. Master Florist Sandy came up with an arrangement scoresheet to guide Federation judges inexperienced with the nuances of arrangement creation and judging. She also volunteered to guide arrangement teams at shows, taking one or two inexperienced judges under her wings at each show and mentoring them. Scoresheets by Sandy quickly followed for floating dahlias and vases.

The Puget Sound Dahlia Association decades ago shamelessly “borrowed” the idea of a seedling challenge from the Washington State Dahlia Society. Seedlings are sold for \$1 each at the May meeting; the results are displayed at the September meeting with prizes for the best (and worst) examples. Early on, the seedlings offered were nothing special – just random leftovers. Then Steve and Sandy took over. From that point forward, each year’s offerings are based on seeds from carefully selected seed parents. For example, there have been anemone, waterlily, novelty, and (in 2020) orchette dahlias. And there have been some commendable introductions from growers who otherwise would not be growing seedlings. While no longer home members of PSDA, the Boleys still support the seedling challenge by donating the seed and volunteering to travel 200 miles to judge the entries.

Steve and Sandy have supported the Federation in many ways, including as Federation representatives for their local clubs. Steve served as a PSDA trustee for a dozen years including time as Federation rep. Then when the Boleys moved to Sumas, Washington to be near their five-acre dahlia farm, they became part of the Whatcom County Dahlia Society leadership team; Steve is currently serving as president and Federation representative, Sandy as vice president.

Judges, teachers, writers, hybridizers, presenters, innovators: Steve and Sandy Boley have served the Federation in many ways. They serve the dahlia well with their many introductions, their leadership, and their research. The Boleys are certainly qualified to become members of the Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers hall of fame.