

## News Release

### Northwest School of Agriculture Awards Top Aggies

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Monday, June 26, 2017

The weather was cooler than most years, but for alumni from the Northwest School of Agriculture (NWSA), the reunion was filled with warmth. The annual reunion of alumni from the Northwest School of Agriculture was held on Saturday, June 24, 2017, on the campus of the University of Minnesota Crookston.

Highlighting the day was the Top Aggie awards program held during a luncheon in Bede Ballroom, Sargeant Student Center. The Top Aggie award is the highest honor a Northwest School alumnus can receive. It recognizes alumni who have displayed exemplary commitment and service to community, church, education, family, or in their occupational field.



The Top Aggies for 2017 were Marilyn (Hovet) Dehning 1956, West Linn, Ore.; Donald Diedrich 1956, Warren, Minn.; and Daniel Wilkens 1961, Fertile, Minn. Alumna Berneil Nelson 1942 (photo, left) was also presented the "One of a Kind" award by NWSA Alumni Board President Willie Huot. The award was given in honor of Nelson's years of dedicated service to the Northwest School and the University of Minnesota Crookston.

[Top Aggie award recipient biographies](#)

After graduating from the Northwest School of Agriculture, Marilyn (Hovet) Dehning 1956 earned a degree in nursing from Deaconess Hospital. From 1959 until 1972 when she earned a post-graduate degree in anesthesia, she worked as a registered nurse and afterward as a nurse anesthetist through 2008. Working in Grand Forks, N.D.; Albert Lea, Minn.; and Portland, Ore., Dehning was a member of the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists as well as the state organizations where she lived.

Her active school life continued throughout her career as Dehning worked with her husband in their custom home construction business as a consultant in design and decorating, as a volunteer in her church, and placing a high priority on raising children. She believes the Northwest School helped set the stage and gave her much of what she needed to succeed in life.



After 40 years of farming and growing a successful agribusiness, Donald Diedrich 1956 retired to a second career as an elected public official serving as county commissioner and representing the area of Polk County, Minn., where he has been a lifetime resident. His role as commissioner allowed him to chair several boards and committees, oversee budgets, and provide leadership on many levels.

He was a founding member of the Warren-Alvarado-Oslo Education Foundation Board and served as president of both the Warren Lions Club and Warren-Alvarado-Oslo Sports Booster Club. Diedrich is a past president of the Northwest School of Agriculture Alumni Association Board. He considers Herschel Lysaker one of his greatest early influences and someone who demonstrated the qualities of leadership Diedrich carries with him to do this day.

Memories of the Northwest School of Agriculture and the lasting friendships he made are significant for Daniel Wilkens 1961. He learned leadership skills that would take him to the University of Minnesota to earn a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering, as a farmer, and as the founding father and current administrator of the Sand Hill River Watershed District, a position he has held for 42 years. He is treasurer of the Red River Watershed Management Board, past chair and current member of the Red River Basin Commission, and U.S. representative to the International Red River Board.

He currently serves as mayor of Fertile., Minn., and has been active on the city council and airport commission and a member of the American Legion, the Experimental Aircraft Association, and more. In 2011 the Red River Basin Commission presented Wilkens with the Water Management Leadership Award, and in 2015, he received the Watershed District Employee of the Year Award from the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

#### Background

The NWSA was a residential high school located on the Crookston campus from 1906-68. The reunion is planned by the Office of Development & Alumni Relations in cooperation with the NWSA Alumni Association board and is always held the last Saturday in June. The first summer reunion of the Northwest School alumni was held in 1925. Prior to that time, it was held during the annual Winter Shows in Crookston.

The NWSA alumni reunion, first held in 1918, brings back alumni from the Northwest School of Agriculture, a residential high school located on what is now the University of Minnesota Crookston campus. The NWSA graduated its first class of 8 students in 1909.

The University of Minnesota Crookston now delivers 34 bachelor's degree programs, 22 minors, and 40 areas of emphasis on campus as well as 14 degree programs entirely online. These degrees are offered in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of 1,800 undergraduates from more than 20 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit [www.umcrookston.edu](http://www.umcrookston.edu).

In the photo, right, left to right, are Don Deidrich, Marilyn (Hovet) Dehning, and Daniel Wilkens

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