

News Release

Northwest School of Agriculture Alumni Association Honors 2009 Top Aggies

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Monday, June 29, 2009

The Northwest School of Agriculture (NWSA) Alumni Association



Pictured (l to r): U of M, Crookston Chancellor Charles H. Casey, Willard Brunelle, '49, Walter Lunsetter, '32, and Director of Development and Alumni Relations Corby Kemmer

honored two outstanding alumni over the weekend with the "Top Aggie" award during a banquet and program at the University of Minnesota Crookston. The awards banquet was the finale of a weekend of events during the annual NWSA alumni reunion.

The theme for this year's event was "Rock 'n Roll Goes Hawaiian" and honored classes from 1929, 1934, 1939, 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964. The reunion is hosted by the Office of Development & Alumni Relations at the U of M, Crookston.

The Top Aggie Award is the highest honor given to NWSA alumni by the alumni association. This award recognizes alumni who have displayed exemplary commitment and service to community, church, education, family, or in their professional career. The Top Aggies for 2009 included:

Walter Lunsetter, '32, grew up near Gatzke, Minn., on the farm where he still lives. He came to the Northwest School of Agriculture (NWSA) when he was only 13 years old to begin his studies. While he found life in the dormitory to be a big change and a challenge, Lunsetter believes living there taught him how to get along with other people and to make friends.

While his formal education ended when he graduated from the Northwest School, Lunsetter found his life on the farm to be a continuous cycle of learning. In 1944, he married his wife, Mable, and they raised four children. The youngest was killed in a vehicle accident when he was only 20 years old. Lunsetter has been active in his church, serving several years on the church council and helping to build the present church when it was constructed in 1956. He is a charter member of the Gatzke Senior Citizens and has served as the club's secretary for 25 years. His membership in the Farmer's Union goes back to the 1950s. Lunsetter has supported both his church and community in countless ways over his lifetime.

Lunsetter is the go-to person for local history in the Gatzke area. Over the years, he has contributed to historical records for both the Minnesota and Marshall County historical societies. He has a deep respect for history and he is known for incredible memory. His nephew, Wayne Lunsetter, describes his uncle this way, "Walter has lived his life as a selfless servant of God, his neighbors, and his community always with a great sense of humor"

Willard Brunelle, '49, Crookston, Minn., was prepared at the Northwest School of Agriculture for a role in leadership. He credits the NWSA with giving him a good foundation on which to build a life. Brunelle served in the United States Air Force and spent 18 months in Korea during the war as a jet fighter mechanic. He is a third generation farmer, and retired in 1992.

A volunteer for many church, community, and non-profit agencies, Brunelle has been active on many boards, including Crookston Cenex board and serving as trustee and board member of St. John's Hospital in Red Lake Falls, Minn. He has been president of the Red Lake Co-op Federal Union, and co-founded the State Advocate Program, Catholic Lutheran Rural Life Commission, Rural Life Outreach of Northwestern Minnesota, Toys for Tots in Northwest Minnesota, the Farm Wrap Program of Northwest Minnesota, and others.

Brunelle and his wife, JoAnn, were married in 1952 and have five children. They have been foster parents for many children and hosted several foreign exchange students from Japan, Israel, and Africa. While his career was in agriculture, Brunelle took roles in leadership as he was needed. During the agriculture disasters of the 1980s, he went to Washington, D.C., to testify on behalf of farmers. He has received numerous awards including the McKnight Foundation Award in Humanitarian Services and the Northwest Minnesota Foundation Ruth Edevold Award for Excellence in Leadership. Brunelle was featured in Time magazine and on ABC's Nightline with Ted Koppel for his work with farm families.

Other highlights during the weekend included a fish fry, social, and dance on Friday, June 26, and class meetings, campus tours, and a special afternoon program on Saturday, June 27. The next NWSA reunion is scheduled for June 25 - 26, 2010.

The 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 opened its doors in 1906 and graduated its first class of 8 students in 1909. The campus educated students for 60 years, and during its last two years of operation, the campus transitioned to a two-year technical college, known as the University of Minnesota Crookston Technical Institute. In 1993, the campus transitioned again to offer baccalaureate degrees and became the first-ever laptop university in the nation.

Today the University of Minnesota Crookston delivers more than 25 applied-science undergraduate degree programs and 50 concentrations, including several online degrees, in agriculture; arts, humanities and social sciences; business; math, science and technology; and natural resources. To learn more, visit www.UMCrookston.edu.

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