Reported Death

D. Kim Black

Dr. D. Kim Black of Rexburg, Idaho died peacefully at his home on 11 Dec. 2011. Kim was born in Richfield, Utah on 10 June 1937 to Alonzo and Hazel McNelly Black. He was raised on a cattle ranch near what is now Capitol Reef National Park in Wayne County, Utah and graduated from Wayne High School. He was the first in his family to graduate from college, receiving an Associates of Science degree in Biology from Dixie College in St. George, Utah in 1957. After serving a 2-year mission for the LDS church to Louisiana and Mississippi, he continued his studies at Utah State University where he completed a BS degree in Agriculture Education in 1961, graduating with high honors.

After graduation, Kim taught biology and vocational agriculture courses at Jordan High School near Salt Lake City, while pursuing graduate studies during the summer months on an NSF fellowship. After 6 years of high school teaching and 4 summers of part-time graduate studies, he completed a MS degree

in Ecology at the University of South Dakota in 1967. He then accepted a teaching position in the Biology Department at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho (now Brigham Young University – Idaho). After 3 years at Ricks College, Kim was granted a sabbatical leave to pursue a PhD in Plant Physiology at Oregon State University in the Horticulture Department, under the direction of Dr. A.N. Roberts.

Returning to Ricks College in 1972, Dr. Black continued teaching biology, but was appointed by then college president Henry B. Eyring to a special committee to investigate expanding the college curriculum. The committee developed a plan for a Division of Agriculture with four departments, and Dr. Black was appointed the first chairman of the Landscape Horticulture Department. As chairman from 1976 to 1987, he developed the curriculum, hired four additional horticulture faculty members, and supervised the construction of greenhouse facilities, teaching and demonstration gardens, and a campus arboretum. From 1987 to 1993, he served as the chairman of the Division (College) of Agriculture, while still maintaining a partial teaching load. In 1993, he declined appointment to a third term as division chair to return to full-time teaching. He retired from Ricks College in 1999, and for 3 years after retirement, taught horticulture courses part time for the University of Idaho.

During his career, he taught courses on all aspects of horticulture, but particularly enjoyed teaching Plant Identification, Plant Propagation, and Greenhouse Management. Although the program was designed with a 2-year vocational focus, Dr. Black was determined that his students understand the science behind the art, and they all described his courses as “brutal.” In 1991 he was awarded the Ricks College Distinguished Teaching Award, was twice honored as the Outstanding Faculty for the Division of

Agriculture, and his students gave him numerous awards and certificates to show their appreciation for his dedicated service. He was a co-founder of the Idaho Nursery Association and was named an honorary Utah Certified Nurseryman by the Utah Nursery and Landscape Association, and an honorary State Farmer by the Idaho FFA.

His academic appointment did not include research, but he involved many of his students in carrying out cultivar trials, and was determined to find fruit tree rootstocks and cultivars adapted to southeastern Idaho’s harsh winters. Always anxious to bring the latest knowledge to his students, he attended a number of ASHS annual meetings during his career, and particularly enjoyed returning to his alma mater for the 1994 meeting in Corvallis, Oregon.

In an effort to teach his children the value of hard work, he helped his teenage sons start a small bedding plant nursery next to their home, and passed on his passion for pomology to one of those sons. His other hobbies included gardening, hunting, fishing, camping, carpentry, woodworking, making hand-crafted western saddles, and raising and training horses.

In retirement, Dr. Black and his wife and partner of 51 years, Janita Torgerson Black, completed multiple service and humanitarian missions, including: 2 years to Vashon, Washington; 18 months to Moka, Mauritius; and several assignments near their home in eastern Idaho. He is survived by his wife, 5 sons, 2 daughters, and 24 grandchildren. He will be fondly remembered by hundreds of beloved former students in horticultural occupations throughout the U.S.

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