2017
John T. Leslie
Award of Excellence
John T. Leslie Award

• First presented to John T. Leslie in 1981
• As a special tribute to Mr. Leslie – the award was named in his honor
• It is presented in recognition of an individual for outstanding leadership and service on behalf of the Florida fresh citrus industry
2017 Recipient

“The Person”
This Year’s Recipient

- Born Dec 10, 1950 in Anniston Alabama
- Started out with no real interest in citrus. In fact, he’s still not sure.
- One sister - Nancy Gordon
- Spent high school years hoeing trees, loading trucks, etc. – for his father and grandfather
  - 1966/67 – Vero Beach High School
  - 1968/69 – Darlington School
- Graduated from Hampden-Sydney College: Majored in history, with a minor in economics
- After college, went to work for a large paper company
- In 1978, after his father had bypass surgery, he was asked to return to the business, starting with harvesting and grower relations
- Married 38 years, 2 daughters, 1 son, two grands and at least one outstanding cousin
- Hobbies include quail hunting and fly fishing
- Represents the third generation in the family business
Fun Fact
In College, he worked
As a salvage diver for Mel Fisher

Any guesses?
The FAMILY
George and his lovely wife Toni

George with his parents,
George and Ann

The whole Clan
Three Generations

George F Hamner Jr
George F Hamner III
George F Hamner Sr
Robert W Graves
Sometimes you wear a white hat

Sometimes you don’t
Hunting Adventures

Just watch out for Dick Cheney

Pssst ... Duke, hop in the driver's seat!

That will teach them to steal my buggy

Little Lord Fauntleroy
Unparalleled fishing skills

George is ready to fish

Flats, Deep or Fresh
George is ready to fish
George being George

Feel a draft?

Born to be wild

Maybe P.I.Q. wasn’t such a good idea

Chief

Feel a draft?
Professionally
A leader of just about everything
Best known for

- Expert working knowledge of rulemaking, regulations and developing sensible solutions. Works with:
  - DEP
  - FDOC Rules, and Florida Citrus Commission
  - Chapter 601
  - Export protocol
- Part of the team that got USDA Partners in Quality (PIQ) started. Won the National Partnership for Reinventing Govt’s 2000 Hammer Award.
- Reinventing and reorganizing. If it can be made better, George will be in the conversation. He is currently leading the charge for consolidating industry organizations in the face of tight supply.
Past President of Florida Citrus Packers
Current member of Board and Exec Comm
Member of the Board of Directors
Past President of Florida Citrus Mutual, past member of the Board of Directors
Past President
Indian River
Citrus League
And
Member of Board of Directors
Chairman
Citrus
Administrative Committee

Also served on Florida Citrus Canker Technical Advisory Task Force
Always ready to engage politically
George is never short on opinion
Wouldn’t you hate to be the
poor guy in the middle?
Recognizing the efforts of colleagues
Ready to make a deal?

By whatever means necessary

Smile

Damnit!
George Hamner Jr.: one of citrus’s most colorful characters

By Tacy Collins

"I had no real desire to be in citrus at all," confesses George Hamner Jr., president of Indian River Exchange Packers (IREP) in Vero Beach.

In high school, he worked for his father and grandfather in the groves, locating trees, and in the packhouse, loading trucks. After college, he accepted an offer from a large paper company, where he had the opportunity to succeed in his own with several transfers and promotions during the five years he was there.

"In 1978, my father had bypass surgery and he asked me to come home to help with the business. I did so reluctantly," says Hamner. "I took over harvesting and grower relations, spending a lot of time in the field and then the packhouse. At the time we were affiliated with Florida Sweet Growers Cooperative."

EARLY INFLUENCERS

Hamner gradually took over jobs for his father. "He stepped aside gracefully, and I gained a huge amount of experience from him on how to handle fruit and how to manage the export market. My dad was well connected and respected in India, Hamner says.

Two lessons he learned from his father are "your word is your bond" and "cash is king — always know how much is available and when."

Another influential win was McGinnis, who worked for Alico Sweet 41 years. "He introduced me to marketing, and we traveled the world together," says Hamner. "He taught me about handling cross countries. He had the ability to work through a problem without passing judgment, because he had a lot of experience in both the domestic and export markets. I know he always figured I knew what I was doing, but he had a great influence on the outcome of things today."

By the end of the 1980s, IREP was packing 5 million cartons a year and had built a new packhouse under Hamner's leadership. "Then the reality of the 1990s set in," says Hamner. "The biggest challenge of my career was an economic one: survival after coming out of a high growth era."

Surviving the 1990s by cutting costs, vertically integrating, and finally consolidating with a strong sales partner, Bernard Egan Co. (ONE Sales), is what Hamner considers his greatest career accomplishment. IREP supplies fruit to ONE, which handles all European and domestic sales for IREP. "Although ONE is a larger company than we are, they have made a great partner," says Hamner, who still directly handles most of the Oriental sales for IREP.

AN EYE ON SUPPLY

"Supply is the issue in a packhouse. You have to be able to satisfy both the customer and the grower," says Hamner. "In the early 1980s, we started planting groves of our own to help strengthen our fruit supply. We began to vertically integrate and realized that the industry had to consolidate. Ninety percent of IREP's fruit comes from groves it owns (approximately 1,500 acres) or leases (approximately 5,000 acres)."

"Fresh fruit growers and packers are married at the hip, even though sometimes we don't think we are," Hamner says. "We are both committed to supplying the same market and we can't do it without each other. It's a symbiotic relationship. When there is overcapacity, we all have a problem."

Hamner says maintaining a continuity of supply is an important goal for his company. "The question is when to increase the groves again," he says. "Long-term, this (citrus) is still a good place to be."
The Challenges have changed over the years, but the will to resolve them remains strong.
George F. Hamner Jr.
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