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Happy New Year Fruit Growers,

We begin the New Year on a sad note having to say good bye to Dan Elliot, one of the giants both literally and figuratively of our association. The photo above is of Dan entertaining and teaching a large crowd about the principals of pruning at MidValley Greenhouse in April, 2022. Dan passed suddenly on December 21. Details concerning his funeral arrangements are at the end of this newsletter.

With winter solstice in the rearview mirror, our days have begun to lengthen again. That means that we can look forward to pruning and grafting in just a few months. I was back in the Midwest in December for two conferences and have to say that the weather was not as pleasant there as it has been in Anchorage. Until just recently, Anchorage has had very mild temperatures in December staying mainly around 30° F. And unlike the last two winters, this has been one of the least snowy Decembers on record. With little snow on the ground and a recent bout of low temperatures, the ground temperature in our orchard at 6” has fallen to 31.7°F. This is the lowest winter ground temperature since I installed the loggers in the summer of 2020.

In the wintertime, I often get questions about chill hours. Our trees all need a certain number of chill hours to come out of endo dormancy in the spring. This is an important mechanism that protects the trees should there be a winter warming event. It is easy to assume from the name that these are hours below freezing, but in fact they are the accrual of temperature/hours above freezing. This process begins in the fall as the trees head into dormancy and the count can continue into the spring until the required number of chill hours has been met to allow the tree to begin budding out when the weather warms. UMN Extension Fruit Production Educator Madeline Wimmer has posted an article on the subject titled, [Understanding Dormancy, and Chilling Hours in Perennial Fruit Crops](#).

I have been lobbying Onset Computer Corporation to include a Utah Model chill hour calculator for their HOBO Pro software that I use with our temperature loggers. With that capability, we could more closely predict when our trees begin the move out of dormancy. The accrual of Growing Degree Days should actually begin around the point that the chill hour requirements have been met (ecto-dormancy), since that is when growth is possible. Unlike the lower 48, it is highly unlikely that our chill hour requirement is met before mid or late April.

Washington State University has named its third apple release. The WA 64 apple has been named Sunflare. The two previous releases were WA 38 (Cosmic Crisp) and WA 2 (Sunrise Magic). WA 64 is a bicolored cross between Honeycrisp and Cripps Pink and will start appearing in stores in 2029. The apple was first bred in 1998, so the journey from breeding to market will have taken approximately 30 years.

WA 38 (Cosmic Crisp) is now the sixth-largest cultivar by volume grown in Washington. When the apple first appeared in stores a couple of years ago, I was not impressed. But now that the trees have matured and the industry knows how to best grow and manage the apple, the quality and flavor is quite impressive. Cosmic Crisp has generated \$28 million in royalties for Washington State University.

Unlike Opal, my favorite Washington grown apple, Cosmic Crisp will stay crisp longer when not refrigerated. I will not buy a room temperature Opal apple as they go soft if not kept in refrigeration. I have attempted to explain the need to refrigerate this cultivar to Costco, but without success. I expect this apple to eventually disappear from store shelves, as consumers have negative experiences. If you want a good Opal, and they are not fresh off the boat in Costco, then I suggest you go to Safeway and request some that are still in the storage refrigerator in the back.

There was a nice article on apples on the BBC website that was forwarded to me by UAA Reference Librarian Ralph Courtney. It made me think about the apples of my childhood in Michigan and the cultivars of apples that we grow in Alaska. The apples grown commercially today are somewhat mono-lithic in comparison. The BBC article by Veronique Greenwood is titled, [The 'Apple Library' With a Lost World on its Limbs](#).

I attended the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable & Farm Market Expo (GLE expo) in December. Just click the link if you would like to [see my notes](#). As always, I learned a lot. There were numerous sessions where faculty and extension specialists from across the country presented on their recent research, findings and observations. The conference included a huge trade show, and an apple tasting. The [Midwest Apple Improvement Association](#) (MAIA) displayed a new apple cultivar called Red Zeppelin. I went back and tasted that apple multiple times. It had a beautiful crispy texture and a unique anise flavor. It made me smile with every bite!

On Thursday, January 9, 2025, we will have our second presentation of the APFGA Winter Speaker Series. January’s speaker is club member Joey Slowik, integrated pest management technician with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Mat-Su Copper River Cooperative Extension Service district office located in Palmer. Joey will present an overview of what integrated pest management (IPM) is, its application to fruit growing, and some of the issues that he has seen. So, get your pest and insect questions ready! At 7:00 pm on January 9, just click the link to [join the meeting](#)! If needed, here is the full [Zoom invite](#).

We have a vacancy on the APFGA Board of Directors and we are looking for a volunteer to fill the position. The workload is not very heavy and includes a monthly board meeting from October through May along with participation in and help coordinating club activities. We have several important issues on the table that will help chart the future direction of our club. So, if you have a passion for growing fruit and believe in the mission of APFGA, this would be an interesting time to be involved. [Email me](#) if you would like more information or are interested in serving on the board.

Our next APFGA Board of Directors meeting will be Wednesday, January 22, 2025 at 7:00 pm. At the time of the meeting, just click the link to [attend the meeting](#). Click the following links for the full [Zoom invite](#), [agenda](#) and past [minutes](#).

Finally, a few words about former APFGA President Dan Elliot who passed away on December 21. Most of the apple trees in our orchard were either grafted by Dan, or Dan provided the scion wood. He exemplified service to our club and freely gave of his time to present classes on pruning and grafting. His orchard featured an amazing array of cultivars, and he was a frequent host for club orchard tours. A fount of knowledge, Dan would willingly share what he knew.

Dan is also the person who was persistent about getting me to join the Board of Directors. Like many of you whom I have approached about serving on the board, I had other obligations when he first asked. But with his encouragement I eventually did get involved. As I head into my seventh year as President, I try to emulate Dan’s willingness to engage in service and to advance fruit growing in Alaska. It is an understatement when I say that I will miss our good friend and model fruit grower.

The arrangements for Dan are as follows: There will be a wake and viewing on Friday, January 3, from 4 to 8 pm at Legacy Funeral Home, 1015 S. Check St., Wasilla. A Requiem Mass will be held on Saturday, January 4, at 10 am at Sacred Heart Church, 1201 Bogard Rd., Wasilla. A reception will follow in the church hall.

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

P.S. For those with annual memberships, it is time to renew your membership for 2025. Please go to the APFGA website, go to the “join/donate” page, and follow the instructions for “Annual Membership Renewing”. Annual membership cost is \$16, and lifetime memberships are \$160. This can be completed on-line using a credit card.

