

# George David Blanpied

June 29, 1930 – November 4, 2007

George David Blanpied, Cornell Professor Emeritus of Horticulture, passed away in Chestertown, Maryland on November 4, 2007. Dave is survived by his wife, Eloise, their children, George David Jr., Peter Raymond, Elizabeth Mott, and three grandchildren.

Dave was born in Ridgeway, New Jersey on June 29, 1930. He earned his B.A. degree in Botany from Dartmouth College in 1952 and served as a line officer in the Navy during the Korean conflict. In 1954, he began his Master's program in Pomology at Cornell, working in the department that would be his professional home for the next 39 years. During his Master's program, Dave was appointed as Assistant Professor of Pomology and he earned his Cornell degree in 1955. He completed his Ph.D. degree in Pomology and Fruit Marketing at Michigan State in 1959 and resumed his Cornell faculty responsibilities of pomology research and extension. Dave retired from Cornell in 1993, and he and Eloise later moved to Maryland where he resided at the time of his passing.

Dave totally devoted himself to research and serving the fruit industry, working mainly on the postharvest physiology of apples. He viewed his responsibility and that of his department as one of scientific support and problem solving for production horticulture. Early in his career, he described his approach as “a series of five-step programs” where he would (1) observe commercial problems in harvesting, handling and storage of apples and pears, (2) plan scientific experiments to resolve the problems, (3) conduct the experiments, (4) demonstrate successful practices on growers' farms, and (5) troubleshoot new practices as they were implemented. Not all of his research projects generated a steady source of grant money, but he passionately pursued those he knew were vital to the growth and success of the industry. His approach earned the respect of the apple storage industry in the Northeast and beyond, and virtually every fruit grower in New York and New England knew Dave personally and many collaborated in his postharvest research and demonstration projects.

Dave began his career working with Professor Robert Smock who was instrumental in establishing commercial controlled atmosphere (CA) storage technology in the United States. At the time, this technology was new to the industry and previously undiagnosed postharvest physiological disorders were observed in the stored produce. Professor Blanpied visited the growers, observed their practices and identified their

problems, and conducted research in Ithaca and at the growers' farms to understand the fundamental issues. In addition to addressing the physiological problems, Dave often needed to solve technical problems with the harvesting and handling procedures and the cold storage operations associated with CA storage. He used his academic expertise to address the physiological problems, he drew upon his natural problem solving creativity to "engineer" harvesting, handling and storage solutions, and his sincere, trusting demeanor enabled him to persuade growers to adopt the results in a timely manner. He could not only identify and explain physiological disorders in stored apples, but he could also provide succinct and relevant comments on historical discoveries relating to the disorder in question. As a result, when Dave Blanpied talked, people listened and everyone was enriched. Extension specialists implicitly trusted Dave's recommendations because they trusted him and they were often involved in the research. Growers willingly hosted meetings where Dave would demonstrate the improvements that had been developed and explain the cautions that were needed to make the improvements work.

Dave published his practical and fundamental discoveries widely in extension literature and research journals and presented his practical findings and recommendations to countless extension audiences throughout the northeast during his tenure at Cornell. In 1986, he received the Cornell Cooperative Extension 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Program Achievement Award. In 1991, he was honored with the Western New York Apple Growers' Gold Apple Award. Dave was selected as one of the "100 innovative horticulturists" by American Fruit Grower and he was a member of Epsilon Sigma Phi honor society and a recipient of the ASHS Carl A. Bittner Award. He was also a member of both the American and the International Society for Horticultural Science and the American Society of Plant Physiologists.

During the course of his career, he worked on many aspects of fruit physiology and storage technology that improved stored fruit quality, reduced losses, extended market and shelf life, and added market value to the product. When the beneficial effects of low oxygen, low ethylene CA storage became known, Dave arranged a sabbatical to East Malling, England to work with the scientists and practitioners who were among the first to use this technology. His work at East Malling also accelerated the transfer of computer based atmosphere analysis and control technology to the North American fruit storage industry. Dave's quest for practical information brought him to research centers and commercial production areas throughout the United States and to British Columbia, Iran and Europe, and always involved collaboration with producers, scientists and students.

Perhaps his most lasting contribution involved predicting the optimal harvest date and maturity for New York apples intended for long term CA storage. Working many years with growers and extension specialists across New York, Dave and his collaborators developed an apple maturity model that used varietal, geographical and environmental factors during the growing season to predict the optimal harvest date for best long-term keeping quality of the fruit. Commercial trials in the different growing regions validated the model locally, and the “Blanpied-Silsby model” continues to be a valuable harvest management tool used by the New York fruit industry. In addition to maturity prediction, the work led to the development of the “Generic Starch-Iodine Index Chart for Apple Maturity” that has become the standard reference used throughout the Eastern United States and Canada.

Dave’s commitment to helping others is also exemplified in his service to the university and greater Ithaca community. He served as Department Extension Leader; and he patiently and willingly mentored younger faculty and graduate students who worked in related disciplines. Although his academic appointment was in research and extension, he made time to advise undergraduates and serve on the CALS Academic Achievements and Petitions Committee. Early in his career, he was a volunteer fireman in the Cayuga Heights Fire Department and later he served on the board of the Finger Lakes Land Trust. Dave was an avid cross country skier and active in the Cayuga Nordic Ski Club that named a Hammond Hill ski trail for him.

Dave loved the outdoors and worked to preserve nature for future generations. He and Eloise enjoyed their woodland property southeast of Ithaca, and Dave worked with the Land Trust and the Nordic ski club to maintain public areas for all to use. After he and Eloise relocated to Maryland, he continued these activities working with the Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge near Chestertown.

He was a serious and complete cyclist and skier who enthusiastically pursued these activities well into his retirement. Le Creasy recalls,

“A new graduate student (Raymond Chee) came to the department from France where he owned a bicycle shop. He considered himself to be an accomplished cyclist. He agreed to go on a ride with Dave at lunch (frequently Dave did 60 miles at lunch). Raymond’s wife told us later that when Raymond got home, he could hardly move and was in pain for several days.”

Marvin Pritts, Chairman of the Cornell Department of Horticulture writes,

“Dave was a competitive cross-country skier, but he would often go to the Adirondacks with some of his buddies and just ski around the mountains. They would rent a cabin for several days, and the group would set off in the morning and not return until dark. Usually their goal was to ski up a mountain trail as far as possible, then put on snowshoes and climb to the peak. The views at that time of the year were fantastic, and the challenge was great.”

From the perspective of his professional colleagues and fruit grower friends, Dave was a quiet, diligent, multi-dimensional scientist who enjoyed life and was not afraid to make fun of himself. He once told how, while contemplating his research projects during one of his frequent road trips to the Hudson Valley, he was startled to see exit signs for the city of Scranton, Pennsylvania and only then realized that he had missed an exit an hour earlier.

Ken Silsby writes,

“David Blanpied was one of the most inspiring people I have ever met in my professional career. While Dave’s passing was our great loss, his contributions to apple storage technology continue to live on.”

We all feel this loss, and remember fondly Professor Blanpied’s unassuming personality, willingness to listen, love of discovery, dedication to service, sense of humor and trusting friendship.

*Jim Bartsch, Chairperson; Le Creasy, Dave Rosenberger*