

# **Donald L. Downing**

April 2, 1931 – February 29, 2008

Donald L. Downing, Professor Emeritus of Food Processing at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York, passed away suddenly on Friday, February, 29, 2008 after a wonderful morning of skiing. He was 76. He was an exceptional mentor, colleague and friend, and will be greatly missed by those he worked with as well as by the food-processing industry.

Don was born in Willoughby, Ohio, on April 2, 1931, to Lelah and Dana Downing, both of who preceded him in death. He grew up in Fulton, New York, where he was a member of the class of 1948 at Fulton High School.

After high school, Don received an Associate degree in Dairy Science from Morrisville (New York) College. He then spent three years in the Army including two years in Europe. Upon his return, he enrolled in the University of Georgia's Food Science and Technology Program. After receiving first his B.S. degree and then his Ph.D. degree, Don and his family moved to Johnstown, New York, where he worked for Beechnut-Lifesavers for three years before joining the Cornell University faculty at the New York State Agriculture and Experiment Station in Geneva, New York, in 1967, where he advanced to full professorship.

Don's distinguished career at Cornell spanned more than 40 years; he attained full professorship in 1980. Although his position was 100% extension, he was always available to Food Science graduate students for advice in all aspects of the food industry. He was well known for encouraging them to attend symposia, conferences and meetings to complement their academic training. He established the annual Downing Graduate Student Excellence Award. In addition, he was a valuable mentor to junior faculty in the Department of Food Science and Technology in Geneva. He gave freely of his time, and was an exceptional friend and colleague.

When he began work at the Station, Don's primary responsibilities were to assist the state food processing industry and farm wineries. To this end, he conducted pesticide training and certification for 13 years. He organized, or took part in, over 150 food related workshops and ran 22 annual offerings of the Better Process Control School required by the FDA for canning operations. He had 152 publications to his name, including Processed Apple Products and the three-volume A Complete

Course in Canning both of which he edited and are industry standards. In addition, Don was one of the first Cornell faculty to work extensively with New York wineries. He was instrumental in creating the first Wine Industry Workshop in 1971 and helped start Cornell's enology extension program.

In 1988, Don created the New York State Food Venture Center in response to a growing need in the New York state food industry. The program, which began as an extension effort for the Department of Food Science and Technology, remains a valuable resource to this day. For most of its existence, Don has been an integral part of the Center's function. He was its first director, running the program until his partial retirement in 1994. After retiring, he continued to work at the Food Venture Center part time as the Process Authority, evaluating the safety of proposed recipes, making changes as necessary, and approving processes. His knowledge of Federal and State food law was inexhaustible, and he excelled in making obtuse regulations easy to understand. He was much sought after as a go between for the FDA and USDA, and could often be found with a phone to his ear, spending time with clients answering questions and offering suggestions.

He earned numerous honors and awards for his work including a Commendation from the New York State Commissioner of Agriculture in 1997 and the USDA-Group Honor Award for Excellence for NECFE program in 2004. As a Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT), Don initiated several divisions and served as chair of several national committees. He was Councilor for Western New York IFT for 21 years, helping to maintain the section's focus and financial health at a time when it was losing industry members due to transfers and plant closings.

In addition to IFT, Don was a member of the Alumni Association at the University of Georgia, the Geneva Country Club, the Finger Lakes Forum, and the Associated New York State Food Processors. He gave consistently both to Morrisville College and the University of Georgia. He showed every day, with words and actions, with an unselfish, enthusiastic, joyful and professional disposition, how to be a Cornell extension leader and a caring mentor. He loved working with people, always providing meaningful assistance and encouragement. His colleagues will be forever grateful for his advice, support and friendship and will never forget all he taught and the kindness he showed to everyone.

Don is survived by his wife of 48 years, Rochelle (Shelly); a son Kurt (Janice), Dublin, Ohio, and a daughter Karla, Phelps, New York; granddaughter Jacklyn Downing, Dublin, Ohio; four brothers, Eugene

(Nancy), Phoenix, New York, Alan Downing, Mexico, New York, a twin brother Dana (Patricia), Valparaiso, Indiana, and Stanley (Josephine), Huntsburg, Ohio; and several nieces and nephews.

*Olga I. Padilla-Zakour, Chairperson; Chang Y. Lee, Randy W. Worobo*

