



Harold Lester Schudel

April 20, 1918 - June 2, 2014

Harold Lester (Hal) Schudel died June 2, 2014, at his home in Corvallis. He was 96.

The oldest of four children, he was born to Edwin O. and Alice Hanke Schudel on April 20, 1918, on the family farm in North Loup, Nebraska. This farm is still in operation by the Schudel family.

Harold attended Barker Elementary School and North Loup High School, graduating as valedictorian of the Class of 1936, then attended the University of Nebraska, studying agronomy, agricultural economics and animal husbandry, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1940.

After graduation he married his hometown sweetheart, Paula Jones. They worked together to pursue Harold's education and in 1941 he received a master's degree in plant breeding. A true Nebraskan, he became a tried and true Big Red Cornhusker. He worked as an agronomist at several jobs in Nebraska until he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II.

After receiving his wings as a B-24 pilot, he trained fledgling pilots in low altitude (Snooper) to fly under the radar. During the moves required by the war, Harold and Paula's first child, David, was born. It was at this time that Harold's Army buddies nicknamed him "Hal," the name that most people know

him by today. His bomber crew became a second family and remained that way.

He was honorably discharged from the service in 1945, when the war ended. When deployed in Portland, he became fascinated by the Willamette Valley. He and his family returned to Nebraska, where Hal helped his father fix some of the results of neglect on the family farm caused by lack of labor force from the war. Anxious to further his education, Hal applied for and received a fellowship at Oregon State College.

The young family moved to Corvallis and Hal began his studies toward a doctorate, picking up odd jobs and student teaching to help the family finances. He became the father of two more sons, Steve and John. In 1953 he received his doctorate and spent several years teaching in the OSC Department of Farm Crops. There he became an avid Beaver believer!

To further supplement income, Hal established a new business, Oregon Turf and Chemical Co., which became full time and meant extra dollars for his growing family.

The seasonal nature of OTC pointed to a need for an off-season business to generate income in the wintertime. A Christmas tree venture could do this. During an elk hunting trip, Hal and soon-to-be partner Paul Goodmonson made a pact to investigate this option.

In 1955 the Christmas tree venture was launched — cutting trees in forestland, getting them to market, etc. Paul and Hal thought there had to be a better way. Why not plant trees in rows and manage them as a crop? So the young entrepreneurs borrowed capital and purchased 300 acres in Kings Valley to test their theory. Soon the plantation Christmas tree was born; more property was purchased and cultivated.

This business venture was a success and soon become a thriving industry. In 1972 Hal purchased his partner's interest and his three sons joined Holiday Tree Farm. Today Holiday Tree Farm, a family-owned business, is the largest in the world, shipping more than 1 million trees a year.

Christmas tree achievements: led the effort to maintain capital gain tax treatment for Christmas trees that was threatened by the Tax Reform Act passed by Congress. Schudel V. Commissioner, 1974: served as president of the Northwest Christmas Tree Association.

Served on the National Christmas Tree Association Board for three terms; initiated the Real Tree Marketing Program; was the first person to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from the NCTA in August 2002. Many awards and recognitions for his contribution to the tree industry.

As a side to the tree business, Hal pursued his love of livestock. Starting in 1980, he and his second wife, Lois, raised and bred quarter horses at their Blodgett ranch, becoming well known for quality quarter horses. Along with that, they raised some commercial cattle. Most of the horses were dispersed in the late 1980s.

In 1992, when Hal retired from Christmas trees and turned over management and ownership to his sons, he and Lois purchased a ranch in Central Oregon and began to raise and breed Black Angus cattle, along with growing vegetable seed crops. Again, another thriving business. Along with business ventures, hunting and fishing always were a pastime when time permitted.

In 2007, when Hal was 90, the ranch was sold and he and Lois returned to Corvallis to retire.

In 2013, Hal was awarded one of Oregon State University's highest honors: He was recipient of the E.B. Lemon Award for Outstanding Alumni. It was a very proud time for him.

He will be remembered for his love of family, hard work, dedication to OSU, and his many friends in the tree and livestock business.

Hal was preceded in death by his parents, sister Dorothy, and brother Maynard.

He is survived by his wife, Lois; sister Mavis Jeffres; three sons, David (Linda), Steven (Julie) and John (Dianne); and stepchildren Jeffrey Stroud (Ann), Kimberly Stroud Snook (Farra) and Gary Stroud (Anya). Hal was proud to be called "Grandpa" by his 28 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests contributions to the Benton County Historical Society.