



### **Inducted: 2003**

Gerry and Renie Long of Delaware were vibrant leaders who worked tirelessly for their community and agriculture. Over a 40-year span, Ontario agriculture benefited from their vision and direction as board members, councillors, and industry leaders. Other sectors, including fruit and vegetable, farm safety, and horticulture, also advanced because of their leadership. From small beginnings with an on-farm market to enhanced marketing capabilities, this couple built Wood Lynn farms into a business recognized industry-wide for apples, eggs, and pork production. Gerry, who was seldom satisfied with the status quo, together with Renie, guided their business and agricultural related organizations to consider, if not accept, what were considered at the time radical ideas that accommodated significant industry changes. The debates that followed enhanced the Agri-Food industry.

### **GERRY and RENIE LONG (1933-1998) (1934-2002)**

Gerry Long was raised on his parents', Elmer and Nettie's farm, located on Commissioners Road on the outskirts of London in an area known as Brick Street. He attended the one room Brick Street School and then H.B.Beal Secondary School finishing after grade ten.

Renie Melchoir was born on her parents' tobacco farm located on Prong Side Road near Port Burwell. It was from there that she attended the local one room school. In 1948 her family moved to London where her father started a house construction business. Renie then attended and graduated from South Secondary School.

After high school graduation Renie met Gerry at the Eastwood Variety on Springbank Drive in London. Gerry being 20 years of age and Renie 19, they began a courtship, which soon headed to marriage in the fall of 1953. They had three sons – Jim, born in 1954, David, born in 1956 and Dennis, born in 1958.

In 1956 Gerry and Renie (then 22 and 21 years of age) formed a farm corporation with Gerry's parents, Elmer and Nettie Long. Wood Lynn Farms Limited's main asset was 10 acres on Commissioners Road that included an apple orchard.

Gerry and Renie then set off as a team. Gerry was the dreamer; the one who believed anything could be accomplished by hard work and diligence. He was impatient with people who could not see his vision. Renie was the counter balance, reasoned, grounded and methodical.

From 1956 Wood Lynn Farms Limited was in many agriculture enterprises

- A milk farm which had been started by Elmer Long and discontinued in the late 1960's
- A retail apple business that began in 1956, Wood Lynn Farms Limited was the first orchard in Ontario to have Pick Your Own Apples beginning in the 1960's
- An egg operation – one of the first with chickens in cages
- Turkeys
- Chicken broilers
- Cattle feedlots – at times they fed over 5,000 head of cattle a year
- Retail fruit and vegetable markets – Wood Lynn Farm Markets had up to 5 locations in London and St. Thomas operated until 1985 when they were sold
- Other business ventures included, strawberries, corn, soybeans, vegetable crops, cow-calf, purebred cattle, dairy cattle, sheep, egg processing, cherries, farm equipment business and standardbred horses
- In 1968 Wood Lynn farms had one of the first total confinement hog operations in Ontario

Today Wood Lynn Farms Limited's main business is the developing and selling of swine genetics. Major markets are in the United States, Mexico and most of South America. Wood Lynn Farms supplied the swine genetics to the largest single site hog operation in the United States.

Gerry and Renie were obviously quite entrepreneurial. They thrived on challenge. There were few if any parts of agriculture or the community that they didn't become actively involved with. Gerry was:

- Chairman of the Ontario Apple Commission for 24 years and the recipient of the Uniroyal Golden Apple Award
- Director of the Egg Marketing Board for 21 years
- President of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetables Association
- President of the Canadian Fruit and Vegetables Association
- President of the Ontario Limousin Cattle Association
- A director of the Western Fair Association for 18 years and President in 1990 and 1991

He received the Easter Seal Campaign service award and the Rotary International's Paul Harris award and in June of 2000, he was inducted into the Ontario Agriculture Hall of Fame.

Gerry, in his later years, believed that the concentration of retail buying was making it difficult for farmers to get their fair share of the consumers' dollar. He came to believe farmers had to join together to deal with this. He was greatly involved in three co-op enterprises that were focused on dealing with this issue:

- As founding chairman of Ingreen Valley Co-operative, his vision was to create a farmer co-op that produced sweet corn, peas and beans in co-operation with Cobi Foods (now Strathroy Foods). Since its

inception, it has been successful to the point of almost doubling its production. The farmer shareholders have profited from their co-operation.

-Marbrite Foods, of which Gerry was a founding director, was a co-operative of apple producers formed to purchase an apple juice canning factory at Ruthven. Unfortunately the lack of apples one year after its inception led to receivership of the co-op.

-Progressive Pork Producers was formed, with Gerry as chairman, with the idea that hog producers were not receiving their fair share for their product. The co-operative has now purchased and is operating a slaughter plant at Conestoga with capacity of 12,000 hogs per week.

In an era when women were not encouraged to be business leaders, Renie, with encouragement from Gerry, was able, due to her drive, intelligence and reasoning to achieve positions few women had seen in agriculture.

Renie became – President of the Ontario Farm Safety Association and was actively involved with the Middlesex Farm Safety Association

- Chairman of Agricorp ( crop insurance)
- President of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Association
- Director on the Ontario Farm Machinery and Food Processing Technology Board
- Director of the Women for the Support of Agriculture
- Councillor for Delaware Township and then the amalgamated Middlesex Centre township from 1993-2002

Gerry and Renie were co-recipients of the Ontario Agriculture College Outstanding Service Award in 1988

The reality of Gerry and Renie Long's legacy is of two people highly motivated and driven to make things happen. They wanted to, and they did, put back into their community and industry. Theirs was a life of victories and defeats. They had a passion for everything they did. They lived their lives at full speed. They started as a team and today we gather here to recognize and honour Gerry and Renie Long, as a team who lived a life of *could be's* not *can'ts*.