



Inducted: 2008

Dr. Kenneth Pretty, originally from Mosa Township, is recognized as a world-renowned soil scientist. Following graduation from the OAC, he became the first Department of Agriculture Soil and Crop specialist in Middlesex County. He received his doctorate in Soil Science from Michigan State University, which led to a job with the Canadian Potash Institute. For the next 10 years he was responsible for Canadian programs involving soil fertility and agronomy research before launching a 20 year career that took him to China 25 times and to 15 other Pacific-rim nations. It was through presenting lectures, seminars and workshops that he was able to impart his Knowledge of the science of feeding the soil to scientists, extension workers, fertilizer industry representatives and farmer groups.

DR. KENNETH McALPINE PRETTY

1929 – 1990

When Bert and Drina (McAlpine) Pretty moved from Sombra Township in Lambton County to the west edge of Middlesex in the early 1930s, they brought everything they had, including two smart little boys named Lyle and Ken.

Little did their teachers at SS #9 Mosa know that eventually these young lads would achieve huge scholastic success with Lyle going on to become a geologist in the western oil industry and Ken becoming a world-renowned soil scientist (their much-younger sister Margaret became a nurse). The farm never left the family; the sons bought their father out and Ken eventually bought his brother's half, and now Margaret's son Tom Field farms the land.

As a youth, Ken Pretty kept busy going to school, helping his father, and along with his brother joined the Glencoe 4-H Beef Club and the county judging team. During the 1940s, Ken and Lyle won Provincial and National 4-H judging competitions. Clearly, however, it was not in livestock where the brothers' future passions brewed. It was the land itself which held their interest.

After graduating from Glencoe High School with honours, Ken attended the Ontario Agricultural College (University of Guelph) and graduated in 1951 with his B.S.A. in Field Husbandry. He landed a job as Middlesex County's first Soil and Crop Specialist, working under W.K. Riddel. For the next three years, Ken proved an asset to the crop growers of the county, and in his spare time was the anchor on the tug of war team. He joined the Middlesex Jr. Farmers and the Young People's Society of Burns Presbyterian Church, and continued to be involved in his family farm.

But that was not enough for Ken Pretty. Perhaps, had he met someone special, he might have stayed put in the county and had a successful agricultural career, but he knew he had more to learn and more to offer. In 1954 Ken left his job and returned to the world of academia, this time across the border to Michigan State University, where, working as a research assistant then lecturer, he earned his Masters then Ph.D. in soil science. He stayed for a brief period at Michigan State as an assistant professor.

In 1959, Dr. Pretty was hired by the American Potash Institute as its Canadian Director. The non-profit organization has been known by various names over time, but began in 1935, with its programs being rooted in the importance of science-based information. Dr. Pretty returned to Ontario, working from Burlington and then Toronto until 1967 in potash fertilizer research and development. He initiated and monitored soil fertility and agronomic research, served as a liaison among scientists, agriculture extension agencies and the growing fertilizer industry, as well as developing educational materials for various audiences, including farmers.

It was in Canada's centennial year that Dr. Kenneth Pretty began the next phase of his career, that as vice-president of the Potash Institute of Canada, which administered the international programs of the larger organization. He first travelled to India on a CIDA-sponsored agricultural task force; he was later assigned increasing responsibility for international program development for the Institute.

He visited Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and China as part of several projects initiating soil fertility and agriculture research projects and educating farmers and extension workers. During those years as VP of the Potash Institute of Canada, Dr. Pretty was a member of the Fertilizer Institute of Ontario, on its board of directors and served as its president. He was an advisor to the Minister as a member of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario and from 1975-1981, Dr. Pretty served on the Board of Governors of the University of Guelph.

Because the Saskatchewan government was investing a lot of money in the potash industry and because the Institutes' Canadian office was based there, Dr. Pretty re-located to Saskatoon in 1977 and became Senior Vice-President of International Programs for the Potash and Phosphate Institute.

Out of Saskatchewan, he continued his international work and traveled to China no less than 25 times over the years. The University of Saskatchewan had a large contingent of Chinese and Dr. Pretty worked closely with them. He was made an Honorary Professor at an academic institute in China, and was very proud of that.

That wasn't the only award presented over the years to Dr. Pretty. Among others, the University of Guelph honoured him with its Centennial Medal for distinguished service to agriculture and now the Dr. Kenneth Pretty scholarship is awarded annually to a student at the University of Guelph in the Department of Land Resource Science who is conducting research in the area of plant nutrition or soil fertility.

In 1988, Dr. Pretty retired from PPI and promptly launched his own crop production and fertilizer consulting firm, calling it KenCan Resources Inc. It was while on the way back to Glencoe, where he maintained a home, to celebrate his 61st birthday that Dr. Pretty suffered a heart attack and died. He was, at the time, busy preparing for another overseas trip.

Farmers all over the world have the same problems, whether they are from Middlesex County or a remote Chinese province, and Dr. Kenneth Pretty left behind a huge body of scientific work and practical advice in order to help those farmers keep their land productive.