

Fresh Digest

A Publication of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council

Fall 2022

WESTLAKE PRODUCE
CELEBRATES
60 YEARS!

RETAILER PROFILE:
ALBERTSONS'
BRYAN PRESLEY

LALIBERTE
LOOKS BACK ON
A GREAT 50 YEAR CAREER



Postnet Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 271
Tucson, AZ



BrightFresh[®]

MICROGREENS

KETO FRIENDLY | SUSTAINABLY GROWN | GLUTEN FREE | ALLERGEN FREE



Grown in sunny Southern California, the ideal climate for growing strong, healthy Microgreens.



Grown in sunny Southern California, **BrightFresh[®] Microgreens**, are small, edible greens produced from vegetables, herbs and other plants. These tiny greens are not only packed with nutrients, but also add a delicate, fresh appearance to any dish - from savory to sweet, to entrees, desserts and smoothies. Due to our ideal growing climate and ample farm-space, we're able to offer our top-of-class microgreens year round. We've been growing microgreens for over 25 years - expertise needed to bring you the highest quality microgreens around!



www.BrightFresh.com

Honestly Grown™ in Bright Natural Sunshine.



Fresh Produce
& Floral Council

Fresh Digest

Tim Linden
Editor

Emma McBride-Taylor
Advertising

Heather Gray
Design/Layout

FRESH PRODUCE & FLORAL COUNCIL 2022 Board of Directors

OFFICERS

Kori Martin

Oppy
Chair

Michael Schutt

Raley's Supermarkets
Chair-Elect

Kristen Reid

MIXTEC Group
Treasurer

Bryan Presley

Albertsons
Secretary

Sean McClure

Professional Produce
Immediate Past Chair

PAST CHAIR REPRESENTATIVES

Marvin Quebec

Quebec Distributing

Roger Schroeder

Honorary Past Chair

DIRECTORS

Andrew Bivens

Westlake Produce Co.

Jacob Cadwallader

Stater Bros. Markets

Brian Cook

Pete's/Local Bounty

Ken Ewalt

Great West Produce Co.

Natalie J. Machado

FreshSource, LLC.

Brad Martin

Perimeter Sales & Merchandising

Mil Mijanovic

Albertsons

Neil Merritt

Bard Valley Date Growers

Lynnie Nojadera

Great West Produce Co.

Debi Orrin

Edge Sales + Retail Services

Veronica Rodarte

Progressive Produce

Rachelle Schulken

Calavo

Caitlin Tierney

Sprouts

Shonna Lea Williams

Cardenas Markets

Michelle Allen-Ziegler

Pactiv

Fresh Digest

A Publication of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council

Features

8

**WESTLAKE PRODUCE
CELEBRATES
60 YEARS!**

12

**RETAILER PROFILE:
ALBERTSONS'
BRYAN PRESLEY**

16

**LALIBERTE
LOOKS BACK ON A
GREAT 50 YEAR CAREER**

20

**ANNUAL FPFC
SOCAL GOLF TOURNAMENT
PHOTOS & THANK YOUS**

24

**FPFC SOCAL
MEMBERSHIP LUNCHEON
PHOTOS & THANK YOUS**

In Every Issue

4

Editor's View

BY TIM LINDEN

6

Executive Notes

BY DON GANN

15

Council News

FPFC HIGHLIGHTS

Volume 50, Number 3

Fall 2022

Fresh Digest (ISSN-1522-0982) is published quarterly for \$15 of FPFC membership dues; \$25 for annual subscription for non-members by Fresh Produce & Floral Council; POST-MASTER: Fresh Produce & Floral Council, PO Box 3627, Lake Arrowhead, CA, 92352

EDITOR'S VIEW

By Tim Linden



Worker Revolution

There is no doubt that the U.S. is in the midst of a worker revolution. Several years ago, the buzz was about increasing the federal minimum wage from its paltry \$7.25 per hour that stood firm since 2009 to \$15 per hour. While Congress has been unable to act, the marketplace has largely taken care of this issue. Employees are just not willing to work for a wage anywhere near that. Worker shortages are widespread as employers adjust their thinking.

The well-publicized Great Resignation was a real thing. In 2021, 25 percent of the U.S. workforce quit their jobs as about 4 million workers quit every month. In 2022, it is expected that 20 percent of workers will resign. Creating a better work/life balance is the top reason employees cite for quitting.

Today, a new buzz phrase is making the rounds, "Quiet Quitting." It appears to be misnamed as it is again a work/life balance concept that refers to workers who are not quitting but rather refusing to go that extra mile for their employer. They do their job, and will do it well, but don't call them after hours, give them extra work or interrupt their weekends.

Remote working and employee recognition & retention programs are two more enduring concepts that point to a shift in power to the employee.

With three kids from 22-34, I have a front row seat to this revolution.

My oldest child graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a degree in Hospital-

ity on a Friday in 2010 and started a management training program with Marriott the following Monday. He has done well. By this spring, he was the general manager of the flagship restaurant of a San Francisco-based restaurant company that owns 30+ units. In April, he heeded The Great Resignation call and quit to enroll in a computer coding bootcamp. Life/work balance is his motivator. After 12 years, he wants a Monday to Friday job that does not require him to rush to the restaurant day and night to fill in for a server or assistant manager who is sick or just didn't show up.

My second child is in the middle of the employee retention program movement. She changed jobs in December after seven years with a destination management company that creates events for companies bringing their top employees to the Bay Area on incentive trips. The company was busy 24/7, which required my daughter to be on call 24/7. She is now working as in-house event planner for a tech company designing programs for their own employees at a much less frenetic pace. Weekends are mostly her own, often she works at home and the perks of working for the tech world are plentiful.

My youngest daughter is a senior at the University of Oregon. This summer she had a paid internship with a San Francisco startup that launched

an online marketplace. My daughter worked from her bedroom as a creator/hunter, which meant sending messages to potential site-users via social media. She was on social media all day long and got paid for it.

My wife and I worry that she is getting a warped view of work, but all three kids disagree. They believe she is getting valuable experience learning how to manage herself and her time. The future, they say, is working remotely from where you want, when you want.

I have to accept that my view of the workplace is not relevant. But I do wonder how the produce industry will adapt...and adapt it must. We work in a tactile industry. From the production of our product in the field to the selling of it in stores and restaurants, it's a hands-on business. Neither the farmworker nor the produce clerk can work remotely...but maybe everyone else in between can.

You don't have to touch the product every day to sell it. Our industry discovered that years ago when buyers stopped walking the terminal market and program buying from centralized offices took hold.

The companies in our business that are accepting this changing workplace are the ones that will survive and thrive. Help wanted signs (on line) from almost every business operation in the country are proving that there are a finite number of good employees. To hire them in 2022 and beyond, you must be an employer of choice. 🌱



I YAM

WHAT

I YAM

YEAR-ROUND YAM/SWEET POTATOES



[#progressiveproduce](#)

progressiveproduce.com

[@progressiveproduce](#)

© Progressive Produce. All rights reserved.

EXECUTIVE NOTES

By Don Gann, FPFC President



Progress Report

We've had a couple more events since I last wrote to you, and they were both excellent.

The City of Hope Luncheon in August had well over 200 attendees, and once again the produce industry of Southern California opened their hearts and wallets. Members of the FPFC raised \$117,000 through the City of Hope rebate programs that is conducted every year and another \$25,000 was collected during the luncheon. All participants deserve a heartfelt thank you for the more than \$140,000 that will go to this very worthwhile effort.

We also held our Southern California Golf Tournament in July. It was a sellout and offered another great opportunity for the members of the FPFC to get together in a social setting with their customers and colleagues.

Both of these events are highlighted in this issue of the *Fresh Digest* with photographs and a list of sponsors. Please remember these sponsors when you are looking for industry partners. It is the sponsors that make these events, and the FPFC itself, successful.

These two events are represen-

tative of what we do best and what we will continue to do. Our focus is on quality not quantity. Toward that end, the Board of Directors of the FPFC met in August and will meet again before going on our Board Retreat in November. We have a couple of important agenda items that you will be hearing more about in the coming months.

One of our top priorities is to redo the website. Our goal is to make it more user friendly while updating its look. We need the website to be the vehicle on which the members can register and Sponsor for events. We have a small staff at the FPFC so we need to be more efficient and we are planning on utilizing the website to achieve that goal. Our plan is to have the new website up and running by December.

Another top Board agenda item is laying out our event calendar for 2023. Again, the idea is to bring the membership the events it wants. Efficiency is again helping to inform our decisions. We need each event to be meaningful and well attended. We have many great events and some need tweaking. The Board is working diligently to make sure each one hits that sweet spot.

The next event on the list is the 2nd Annual Luau on September 24, followed by the Northern California Golf Tournament on October 5, and in December, the Membership Luncheon and Holiday Charity Auction. These promise to be winners for all who attend.

We are being introspective as we explore what are the best events for our membership. These past two years have been challenging for everyone in the association business that relies on face to face events to fuel their activities. It's easy to blame COVID when an event doesn't quite attract the crowds you were hoping for. But we are going deeper than that. We are not afraid to explore options, listen to member feedback and evolve.

The FPFC is on good footing with a solid membership core. We believe 2023 is going to be a great year and we are going to be there with an impactful calendar of events. The Expo is set for April 27 with a return to the Anaheim Convention Center. We are building our calendar around that foundational event. By later this fall, we plan to release the full slate of 2023 events. 🌱

Conventional & Organic Carrots • Navel & Valencia Oranges

A Healthy Pair!



Contact Sales

661.854.3156

sales@kernridge.com



www.kernridge.com

Westlake Produce Celebrates 60 years!



Like all great stories of legacy, it starts with a person and a vision. In the case of Westlake Produce Company, it began with two: Joe Sims and Bill Brooks Sr. in 1962. The integrity with which Westlake operates today can be traced back to the early Brooks' and Sims' philosophies.

Bill Brooks Sr. and Joe Sims first opened an office in the Los Angeles Produce Terminal above the 7th Street Market in early 1962. The company specialized in potatoes, onions, and melons. A few years later, they added their two sons, Billy and Dan.

They began to grow the business while expanding their reputation as valued partners to customers and growers. Sixty years later, their legacy lives on despite the many changes and transitions within the industry. One of the early architects of what is now Westlake Produce is the son of Bill Brooks Sr., known to most as "Billy." Billy, a recent recipient of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council's prestigious Norman H. "Buz" Bolstad Lifetime Achievement Award, has been a part of the produce industry most of his life, and decades later, he still loves what he does. Being mentored by his father and Joe Sims, Billy's dedication and commitment to the training of the sales team along with the care for growers and customers has been one of the foundations of Westlake's success.

Two years after Brooks and Sims started, Ed Miller established his own business specializing in Florida citrus, melons, onions, and lettuce. One of his early strengths was exporting Florida citrus to

Japan, being one of the first American companies to do so. As the company grew, Ed later added Harland Heath, along with his three sons, one of which was Jeff Miller, who eventually took ownership of the company. During his leadership of the Ed Miller Company, Jeff mastered the ability to diversify. Many times, throughout his career, the Florida citrus crops experienced harsh weather conditions that would set back their citrus production for years. These challenges forced Jeff to pivot to Texas and import citrus programs to fulfill customer needs.

Some 10-plus years later, another company was created. The name on the door is who we recognize today. Westlake Distributors was started in 1977 by Harvey Sherman and Ernie Colton as distributors of melons, citrus, grapes, and vegetables. Shortly after opening, they added Dale Leifer to their team, who brought a vast experience of retail, wholesaler, and distributor knowledge. Then, with the focus on growth, Westlake began to add key sales staff like Bob Franks, Randy Dunham, Jan Delyser, Genji Seki and Glen Bezanson. These sales leaders added the apple, pear, berry, avocado, imported specialty produce, potato and onion commodities to Westlake's portfolio.

During the late '80s and '90s, the industry witnessed the mergers of many retailers. These consolidations inspired many supplier companies to do the same to keep up with the volume demands of their retail partners. The leadership of the three companies, which make up Westlake today, saw this as an



WESTLAKE PRODUCE

Celebrating



IN THE
PRODUCE INDUSTRY



opportunity to be sustainable for years to come. The first merger between Westlake Distributors and the Ed Miller Company was in 1997. Consolidating the two companies made them stronger in the marketplace, especially in the citrus categories. With the addition of Jim Guthrie and Miller's two brothers, the company operated as Westlake-Miller. In 2000, Brooks and Sims merged with Westlake-Miller, adding the potato, onion, rice, and dry bean categories. This move included adding Joe Ciccarella and Shawn Patrick to the Westlake team. The company operated as Westlake-Miller, Brooks and Sims for the next several years. In 2006, the company was rebranded to who we know today as Westlake Produce Company.

But... don't be fooled; the legacies and characteristics of the three companies, Brooks and Sims, Ed Miller Company and Westlake Distributors, are still deeply embedded in our culture.

"One of the biggest blessings in my career is the fact that I was able to be mentored by Billy, Jeff and Dale and their different philosophies of doing business," says Andrew Bivens, who now serves as the current president and CEO of Westlake Produce. He added, "It is priceless to have three industry leaders who all have different strengths under the same roof to teach and guide your decision-making when faced with various challenges."

Throughout the years, the industry has seen several changes on all sides of the supply chain. Once an entirely male-driven business, Westlake is proud of its inclusion and diversity efforts. Westlake has grown into a 21st-century workforce with employees from varied backgrounds, bringing a vast array of experience and talent to the table. Joe Ciccarella, who has been with Westlake for 23 years, has recently been promoted to the position of vice president of business development. One of his new young mentees, Martin Kim, stated it best, "I love the fact that we work as a family more than individual performers. Coming into an environment of seasoned successful people motivates me daily to become the best sales-

man I can be."

Jeff and Billy recently followed the example of those before them. They passed the ownership and day-to-day operations to a few insiders within the company to be the next stewards of the Westlake brand. They appointed Shawn Patrick as the chief sales officer, Peter O'Brien as the company's chief financial officer, and Andrew Bivens as president and CEO.

After many years at the wheel, Jeff Miller and Bill Brooks are still influential in Westlake's success. They are both still active in the company's decision-making and advise on the day-to-day activities. Now, headquartered in the historic downtown area of Downey, Westlake also operates out of two warehouse facilities in Vernon, along with a sales office in Oklahoma City. At its corporate offices in Downey, the leadership fosters an environment of openness and inclusion. In addition, they adhere to Westlake's core values that have emerged over the last 60 years, which are: Lead by example, Communicate, Listen, Process & Act, Embrace Change, Follow Through, Exceed Expectations, Stay True to Who We Are, Treat Our Indus-

try as Family, Keep an Attitude of Gratitude, and most importantly, HAVE FUN!

Like Mother Nature, the company continues to evolve and change. But, just like the first navel tree planted in Riverside by Eliza Tidbit, Westlake Produce Company's roots run deep in Southern California. The orchard may have expanded but protecting and honoring the legacy and examples set before continues to be a focus, while advancing with new endeavors and uses of technology. Recently, Westlake added a bagging line and introduced new commodities to help better serve their growers' and customers' needs. Westlake Produce has evolved into a dynamic, competitive and successful leader in the produce industry. To the many people who came before us, we hold the utmost respect and are grateful as we forge ahead, in taking the company into the next 60 years! 🌱

"The faces have changed, the company has changed names, but the commitment to high quality and reasonable price value has not."
- Steven Connors, Basin Gold.



Save the Date!

Wednesday, October 5th
**16th Annual Northern
California Golf Tournament**
Wente Vineyards
Livermore, CA

Wednesday, December 7th
**Membership Luncheon &
Charity Auction**
Venue TBD
Southern California

2023 FPFC Expo

Thursday, April 27th, 2023
Anaheim Convention Center
ACC North 100 Hall
Anaheim, CA



Fresh Produce & Floral Council
www.FPFC.org
info@fpfc.org
714.739.0177

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS WITH ALBERTSONS

Bryan Presley
Procurement Manager,
Albertsons

By Tim Linden



Bryan Presley is the quintessential produce retailer. He comes from a retail background, worked his way up from the bottom and has stayed with the same retailer for his entire 40 year career. He could be the poster boy for the retailers of his generation.

Born in 1962 in Southern California, Presley grew up in the bedroom community of Garden Grove. He had an uneventful childhood, playing football and basketball in high school but didn't possess the type of talent needed to take it to the next level. Instead, he planned on being a teacher and started his educational trek on that path at nearby Orange Coast College (OCC).

Like many career retailers, he was first introduced to the business by his father who spent more than a quarter century in the business as a store director. Warren Presley started with May-

fair Markets and spent much of his career with Albertsons, the same banner that has been home to Bryan's career. "My first job at Albertsons was in high school when me and a couple buddies would sell Christmas trees at my dad's store during the holidays," Bryan Presley recalls.

That experience didn't quite bite him with the retail bug, however. He enrolled at OCC heading toward that teacher career and financing that part of his life by working at Albertsons. "I started in August of 1982 by ripping cardboard at night and being part of the cleanup crew," he said. "Then I became a courtesy clerk, which was called a box boy at the time. Eventually I worked my way into produce."

Presley was still pursuing the teacher track, but he started making pretty good money. "I was making more money than some of the people I



knew who went into teaching,” he said.

It was also about this time that he got married to his bride Susan, who he has been with for 36 years. “The first year I was in produce I started thinking about retailing as a career,” he said. “I liked it. Every day was different. And I liked working with customers and helping them find the produce items they were looking for.”

He showed an aptitude for produce and started getting promoted. “My first store as a produce clerk was in Santa Ana,” he said. “I moved up to 2nd Man in Mission Viejo and then took the same position in Fountain Valley. My first produce manager job was in the same Fountain Valley store.”

Presley remained a produce manager for 12 years until 1999. That year he moved into the produce warehouse as a quality control clerk. It was his task to check the quality of the produce as it came into the warehouse and reject the loads that didn’t make the cut.

In 2001, he became a floral buyer and then articulated to the produce buyer position about a year later. Eventually he became a senior produce buyer and became the replenishment manager in 2017. “You name it, I bought it,” he says about his produce career. “Buying bananas is probably the one item that has remained with me throughout my career. But I have bought pretty much everything in the department.”

In his current position, he manages the produce

buying operation for all 336 Southern California stores under its three banners: Albertsons, Vons and Pavilions. Presley said he has reached the procurement management position that he aspired to early in his career. And sees it as a very good career. He is motivated each day by a simple but important mantra for both his company and the world. “I want to sell more produce!”

Bryan mentioned a handful of mentors that helped him along the way and taught him a lot about the produce industry: Mike Ito, Vince Maggio, Gordon Okabayashi and Mark Lazenby. “Mike Ito hired me as a Q.C. and taught me that job. Hiring me as a Q.C. kept me in produce,” he said. “Mark and Gordon showed me the ropes and taught me how to buy when I moved into the buying office. Gordon was in produce forever and Mark was the senior buyer when I became a buyer. When you are in the store (as a produce manager), you think you know everything about produce, but really you know nothing about buying the product. Vince was another senior buyer who always had time for me and was always willing to answer my questions.”

Presley said the most important lesson he learned from those mentors over the years was to “stay calm. It’s produce. You can’t get too upset. Things are going to happen.”

That potentially frenetic aspect of buying produce is what Presley likes best. “It does change every



Bryan and his wife, Susan

day. You have to adjust. Weather can change things or a truck doesn't show up. You constantly have to adapt."

He said there are a list of issues that the buying department has to track every day and though over time certain issues repeat themselves, every day is a little bit different. "Another important lesson is that you have to treat people fairly. If you treat the vendors fairly, they will treat you right."

Presley said when he does have a bad day, he harkens back to his grandmother. "She competed in roller derby in the '30s and '40s and in fact is in the Roller Derby Hall of Fame. She was as tough as they come. She never missed a day of work in her life and lived to be 98. It's funny, when I am having a bad day or I have a task I just don't want to do, I think of her. And that keeps me going."

Presley also appears to be the quintessential husband and father. When asked if he has a favorite pastime or hobby, he notes that he spends most of

his vacation days working as an assistant to his wife at her day care center in Aliso Viejo. "We're home bodies," he quipped, noting that his wife is a great sewer and he like to golf and go on hikes with his daughter.

He and his wife do have two adult daughters: Ashley is a speech pathologists and Barbara is in the digital art world. "She has an art degree, and she does something in the art world, but I can't tell you exactly what she does."

Presley also owns up to doing most of the cooking in the family kitchen, primarily "because my wife hates to cook. I don't do anything too fancy, but I hold my own."

For his favorite recipe, he again summons memories of his grandmother. "We call it Grandma Gert's Chicken," he said. "It was her recipe and her name was Gertrude." 🍗



From Left to Right: Bryan's daughters Ashley, and Barbara, Anaheim Ducks mascot Wild Wing, future son in law Matt, and Bryan Presley at Teacher Appreciation Night at a Duck's game. "We are a big hockey (Ducks) family," Bryan says.



THE FPFC WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS

Botany Lane Greenhouses
Carmen Garcia

Floral Union Farms
Andy Cedano

Harvest Sensations
Randy Akahoshi

Limelight Groves
Bonnie Evans

United With Earth, Corp.
Daryoush Davidi

2022 FPFC EVENTS

October 5th
FPFC NorCal Golf Tournament
Wente Vineyards, Livermore, CA

December 7th
FPFC Membership Luncheon - Charity
Southern California - Venue TBD

FPFC OFFICE

714-739-0177
Website: www.fpsc.org

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Tim Linden
925-258-0892
tim.linden@gmail.com

ADVERTISING OFFICE

Emma McBride-Taylor
714-739-0177
emma@fpsc.org

FPFC MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council is to connect members to the information, education and professional network they need to increase knowledge, grow their businesses and collectively advance the industry.



Henry Always Just Ripe[®]

Jon • (830) 379-0288
Billie Jo • (210) 226-4504
Ozzie • (760) 535-3903

*Year-round, custom ripened fresh
organic and conventional avocados*

www.henryavocado.com - Since 1925



Bill and Ginny Laliberte with members of his team at an FPFC Dinner Dance

LALIBERTE LOOKS BACK ON A GREAT 50 YEAR CAREER

By Tim Linden

Southern California produce veteran Bill Laliberte, who is never lost for a colorful adjective, describes himself as a “grinder.”

“When you come from nothing, you are either going to be a grinder or you’re not going to make anything of yourself,” he said.

He attributes his long career and success to starting his day earlier and working harder than anybody else. “When we started WJL – and when I say we, I mean my wife, Ginny, and me. I wouldn’t have accomplished anything without her – I would come down to the market at 1 a.m. and then be in the office from 5

a.m. to 5 p.m. and on call 24/7.”

It is a tribute to Laliberte’s work ethic and emblematic of his philosophy that when he started WJL Distributors on January 1, 1996, he still had to prove himself. By that time, he had been an active and highly visible member of the Southern California produce scene for more than 20 years and had seemingly secured his spot as an important member of that community. But he still believed he needed to work harder than everyone else to succeed.

Bill Laliberte came into this world in 1948, the son of a produce man. He was one of seven sons, and

the only one that followed his dad in the business, but that wasn't Bill's plan. Following high school, Laliberte went to St. John's University in Central Minnesota, got his bachelor's degree and was planning to go to the University of Minnesota Law School. But it was the late 1960s with the U.S. Military fully entrenched in the Vietnam War.

Bill joined the U.S. Navy. His college degree earned him a slot at the Naval Communications Center in San Diego, which is where he served the entirety of his three-year hitch. When he was discharged in 1973, the idea of going to law school was still a possibility but he wanted to try something else first and figure out who he was and what made him tick.

His father, who had purchased a lot of produce from C.H. Robinson in his day, suggested that Bill try to hook up with the nationwide company's Los Angeles office.

It was great advice that has Laliberte putting the finishing touches on a 50 year career. He was hired by Bill Bennett and John Taylor, who were running the Los Angeles office located above the Seventh Street Market. Bill started his produce career on September 1, 1973. "I am going to continue through the end of our current fiscal year and retire on Feb. 1, 2023," he says, noting that he does plan to do some produce consulting work after that. "I think I have something to share. I am hoping to assist people in their connections with suppliers and retailers. I'm not a retail guru, but I am a good communicator. You have to be knowledgeable in this business about produce, varieties, labels and I am."

He notes that one of his enduring strengths as a salesman was knowing the product and the marketing situation when he made that call to buyers or suppliers each day. He believed he had that one opportunity to make the sale and so he wanted to be certain that he could answer any question when asked. "If you have to get back to them with the answer, the sale is gone," he says.

When Laliberte began with CHR, he indicated the office was filled with a treasure trove of knowledgeable produce people all working hard to make a name for themselves. And they did. "There was Bill Bennett and John Taylor. Allen Lund handled the transportation Bill Vogel and Bob Franks were in that office. I was the new guy in town and I learned a lot."

Laliberte stayed with CHR for three years, but then his wife became pregnant with their first child... "My daughter, who just turned 45!" The young pro-

duce guy didn't know what he didn't know, but he believed he was worth more than what he was getting paid. "Joe Strock at Cal Pine Distributing, which was located right next door to CHR, offered to double my salary."

He took the job and learned a valuable lesson. "Everyone I was doing business with came with me. I learned right then and there that it's not about the company, it's always about the people. This industry is based on relationships."

Strock died suddenly a year and a half later, which left Laliberte and Kent Pidduck running the company for the better part of two decades.

In 1996, William J. Laliberte established WJL Distributors and has prospered for more than a quarter century as a distributor focusing on the fruit category, including apples, cherries, pears, peaches and plums, and the berry category, including blueberries, blackberries and raspberries.

It is clear when talking about his career, Laliberte believes to his core that it is the people that make the produce business what it is. He peppers the conversation with the names of many mentors, suppliers, retail partners and colleagues that he worked with and for over the years. It was these many people that helped him build a very successful career.

He mentioned Morrie Sanders of Sanders and Sons and Jerry Henggeler of Henggeler Packing Company as two Idaho fruit suppliers that were instrumental in his success. "Craig Casca at GEM-Pack got me in the mixed berry business. I used to do business with his father."

On the retail side, he recalled collaborating with Dick Spezzano to expand blueberry sales and noted a long list of Ralphs retail executives that were instrumental in his growth including Kerry Hodges, Karl Markel, John McCormick and Dave Ackerman. Then he remembered that Will Miller at Smart & Final was a great retail partner as well.

As he was mentioning these names, Laliberte lamented that he was sure he would leave out many, many people who were helpful over the years.

Next, he talked about WJL and the great list of colleagues he has hired. The company's founder has a knack for finding people in other lines of work and turning them into produce people. "It's a people industry. If you have a good personality and are eager to learn...and you have a grinder's mentality, you can make it."

Many years of service is another trait that most



Members of the WJL team

of his employees seem to share. His first two hires were CFO Tracy Ellis and Todd Butler, who was an assistant in a pro shop where Laliberte golfed. “After the first day, Todd wanted to quit. I told him he had to stay 90 days and then he could quit. He is still here as an integral part of WJL. Tracy is also still with me.”

Oscar Cuellar was culled from a local country club where he was in foodservice. “He was in charge of food for both the Men’s and Ladies Grill at North Ranch Country Club. He was a great people person from Guatemala, who was working three jobs. I told him if he comes and works for me, he will only have to work one job. He’s a grinder.”

Mike Baron is another WJL employee who came from outside the business. “He was an I.T. guy with AT&T,” Bill said.

Laliberte has also plucked numerous salesmen from the industry from both the buy and sell side of the equation. The list of industry veterans that have spent significant time at WJL include Jim Noe, Rick Moreno and Sal Ortega.

While people are important, Laliberte said it also

helps to have a plan and the vision to see which direction to take the company. He did that on the supply side by focusing on fruits, especially from the Pacific Northwest. Many of those connections were first made early in his career. “When I started at CHR all I did was vegetables out of California for the first year. Then Bennett and Taylor sent me up to Yakima and Wenatchee to get them an apple deal. They gave me a Blue Book and told me to follow the railroad tracks. In those days everyone shipped by rail and had a rail siding at the packing shed.”

The apple contacts led to pears and cherries and then Laliberte started doing business in Idaho.

On the sell side, his territory is Southern California and early on he noted that the Hispanic chains were growing at a very fast clip. “Sal and Oscar helped us develop the Hispanic chain business,” he said. “When we started with Superior, they had only seven or eight stores. Now they have close to 50.”

WJL also worked with high end stores such as Bristol Farms and Gelson’s. “Gelson’s had three stores when we started with them. Now they have 27.”

Another Laliberte recipe for success: “We adapt according to what retailers want us to do. In 2008, we bought a warehouse in Vernon with 40,000 square feet of cold storage. It’s there to facilitate the needs of our retail customers. We service many of our retail customers every day or every other day. It is an evolutionary thing we did to make ourselves more valuable to our customers. We stepped up and bought our own facility to enhance our position with our retail partners. And they are our partners.”

Another key to Laliberte’s success was his involvement in the Southern California produce community at large. In 1977, he became very involved in the City of Hope, which is the Los Angeles produce industry’s collective charity of choice. He helped establish the City of Hope Golf Tournament and has served as chair of that committee ever since.

Laliberte said creating a local industry charity allowed the produce community to give back in the course of their daily work. “I was able to participate while at work. That made it very doable,” he said.

He has also been a consistent supporter of the Fresh Produce and Floral Council for the past half century. When he started his career, the FPFC office was two doors down the hall. “Bill Bennett and John



Bill and Adam Laliberte enjoying a day of golf at Bandon Dune.

Taylor were big supporters and so were the people at Cal Pine. It’s a simple formula,” Laliberte said. “You put the retail people in the forefront and the vendor community will support it. I have always been a big supporter of the FPFC.”

Of course, one of Bill’s most important hires was that of his son Adam Laliberte, who will be heading up the operation when Laliberte the elder steps down. Adam worked for WJL before going to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena in the early 2000s. After graduating he did work as a minister for several years, but with a growing family, he reunited with his father and joined WJL in 2006. He became a partner three years ago. And Bill knows he is leaving the company in very capable hands.

He will still keep an eye on the operation, but he is going to do it from afar. “We are building a house in South Carolina,” he said. “We’ve been going to Sage Valley Country Club (in the southwest corner of South Carolina) since 2003. We’ve made a lot of friends there and we love it. And I didn’t have to sell my wife on the idea. She found the property and is doing all the planning for the house. All our grandchildren are out here (California) so we will be back a lot.”

And as Bill noted, he does expect to keep his hand in the business. He’d like to take produce people on trips to the growing region where they can learn more about the products they sell and the people that grow them. It is after all, Laliberte’s firm belief that it is a people business where knowledge is king! 🌱



Bill and his parents when he graduated from St. John’s University in 1970.



FPFC SOCAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

Tuesday, July 19, 2022

Tustin Ranch Golf Club

On Tuesday, July 19, FPFC members gathered for the sold-out 30th Annual FPFC golf tournament at Tustin Ranch Golf Club in Tustin, CA. After a full day of golfing, FPFC Chair Kori Martin of Oppy and Golf Committee Chairs Bill Laliberte of WJL Distributors and Shonna Williams of Cardenas Markets, recognized the winning teams at the awards ceremony. Closest to Pin winners were, Philip Barrientos of Baja Son Growers, Carlos M., and Michael Richmond of Veg-Fresh.

The Men's and Women's Longest Drive Winners were MJ Morin of Kern Ridge Growers and Esther Hernandez of Veg-Fresh; First Place Team was Todd Butler and Adam Laliberte of WJL Distributors, Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets, and Shonna Williams of Cardenas Markets; Second Place Team was Michael Richmond of Veg-Fresh, Roger Yang, Mark Hannan and Marco Fosado of Jetro; Third Place Team was Kern Ridge Growers, Jason Higbee, Doug Stewart, MJ Morin and Mark Weimann. 🌱



1st Place Team, Jake Cadwallader of Stater Bros., Adam Laliberte of WJL Distributors, Shonna Williams of Cardenas Markets and Todd Butler of WJL Distributors.



2nd Place Team, Michael Richmond of Veg-Fresh, and Mark Hannan from Jetro. Not pictured: Roger Yang and Marco Fosado of Jetro.



3rd Place Team, Kern Ridge Growers, Mark Weimann, MJ Morin, Doug Stewart and Jason Higbee.



Bill Laliberte of WJL Distributors with Putting Contest Winner, Jason Higbee of Kern Ridge Growers.



Esther Hernandez of Veg-Fresh takes home the Women's Longest Drive Award!



MJ Morin of Kern Ridge Growers takes home the Men's Longest Drive Award!



Therese Ferrara with Preferred Sales, Fernando Azevedo of Gourmet Garden with Jeff Burch participating in the Putting Contest.



Elizabeth Cherry of The Packer; Marvin Quebec of Quebec Distributing Co., Mike Dittenber of Warren Packaging, Dan Acevedo of GreenFruit Avocados; and Therese Ferrara of Preferred Sales.



Parker Nishi of Melissa's, Rick Cruz of Pavilions, Jason Grolnick and Alex McCloskey of Church Bros.



Jennifer Zendejas of CMC Sales & Marketing and Therese Ferrara of Preferred Sales with Kristine Gaitlin and Virginia Morrison of Litehouse.



Baltazar Garcia of Local Bounti, Philip Barrientos of Baja Son Growers, Dave Howald of USA Pear Bureau, Chris Rheault and Patricia Jimenez of Buyers Edge, with Jessica Gagel organic girl and Tom Rossi of Buyers Edge.

Thank You Golf Tournament Donors

Gem Pack
 Gee Whiz Fruit Co.
 Twin River South LLC
 Evans Fruit Co.
 Western Veg Produce
 Nat Fenn & Son
 Rivermaid Trading Co.
 La Fiesta Hispanic Spices
 Housik Megerdichian
 Sage Fruit
 Primavera
 organic girl
 Central West, Santa Maria
 The Packer
 WJL Distributors



Jen Caesar and Shane Aldrich of Dimetri Gardikas Produce.



Rick Cruz of Pavilions with John Carter of Limoneira.



Dominic DeFranco of Progressive Produce with Bryan Kim of In N Out.

SoCal Golf Sponsors

Goodie Bag

Perimeter Sales & Merchandising

Welcome Bar

Bard Valley Date Growers

Happy Hour Bar

Natalie's Orchid Island Juice

Koozies

Fresh Gourmet

Name Badges

Dole Fresh Veg

Golf Balls

Eagle Eye Produce
Professional Produce

Golf Tee Kit

WJL Distributors

Hats

Sunset Grown/Mastronardi

Tustin Ranch Player Giveaway

The Elite Bouquet
Warren Packaging

Breakfast Truck

House Foods
Progressive Produce

Lunch Truck

Sonora Farms
Edge Marketing + Retail Services
USA Pear Bureau

On Course Demo's

Natalie's Orchid Island Juice
Avocado Queen
Joolies

Hole-in-One

Cal Fresco

Golf Towels

Church Bros.
Beachside Produce
Great West Produce Co.
Veg-Fresh Farms

Closest to Pin

D.Gardikas Produce
Legacy Farms
Rainfield Ranches

Individual Longest Drive

Melissa's

Putting Contest

Marikian Produce

Candid Photos

North Shore Living Herbs + Greens

Cigars

Mariani Nut Co.

Sunscreen

Melissa's

Table Tents

WJL Distributors
Limoneira

Event Signage

Calavo
Brighter Bites
Kern Ridge Growers
WJL Distributors
Marikian Produce
Oppy

Sample

Windset Farms
Litehouse
Wonderful Sales
Taylor Farms
NatureSweet



FPFC SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP LUNCHEON

August 17, 2022

Sheraton Cerritos



FPFC Members that participated in the Case Rebate Program with City of Hope. L to R: Walt Fillip of Stater Bros. Markets, Ryan Conlon of Progressive Produce, Kelly Craner of B&C Fresh Sales, Troy LeCheminant of Westlake Produce Co., Shawn Patrick of Westlake Produce Co., Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets, Adam Laliberte of WJL Distributors, Dennis McIntyre of Stater Bros. Markets, John Savidan of Gelson's Markets, Fernando Soberanes and Kellee Harris of Giumarra, Mike Asdoorian and Blake Lee of DLJ Produce.



Mario Bryant with Stater Bros. Markets signing the National Anthem before the luncheon.



Patient-speaker and cancer survivor, Gina Lozano of Veg-Fresh Farms.

June Monroe of Rynn & Janowsky, LLP; with Kelly Craner of B&C Fresh Sales, Blake Lee of DLJ Produce, Jacob Cadwallader of Stater Bros. Markets and Bill Coombs of DLJ Produce.



Cheryl Kennick of City of Hope with Bruce Flanigan and Nancy Hamilton of Advantage Fresh; Dr. Charles Brenner of City of Hope and Dennis McIntyre of Stater Bros. Markets.



A few of the FPFC Apprentices, Sandra Aguilera of Calavo, Luis Gonzalez of SunFed, Katie Gagnon of Grocery Outlet, Bailey Slayton of Country Sweet Produce and Kathleen Ezell of Wonderful Citrus.

Thank You Luncheon Sponsors!

Key Sponsors

Westlake Produce Co.
DLJ Produce
Zespri International

Associate Sponsors

PK Packaging
Veg-Fresh Farms
Veritiv
Mixed Nuts

Social Hour Sponsor

Bard Valley Date Growers

Photo Sponsor

North Shore Living Herbs + Greens

Décor Sponsor

B-Fresh Floral



Bill Laliberte of WJL Distributors with Bill Coombs of DLJ Produce.



Charles Rowland of Fowler Packing with Ryan Sanchez of and Kyle Morris of Albertsons.



Dennis McIntyre of Stater Bros. with Roger Schroeder of PK Packaging and Mark Widder of Veg-Fresh Farms.



Liz Bunch of Edge Sales + Retail Services, Eduardo Beloto of ReadyPac, Debi Orrin of Edge Sales + Retail Services with Ryan Sanchez of Albertsons.



Fatima Moussawi of Zespri International with Sonny Flor of Stater Bros. Markets and Shannon Dambach of FreshSource.



It's Antioxidant Season.

Fight the free radicals that cause oxidative stress with POM Wonderful beverages, pomegranate arils, and pomegranates. They're a great way to give your family an antioxidant super boost.

© 2021 POM Wonderful LLC. All Rights Reserved. POM, POM WONDERFUL, ANTIOXIDANT SUPERPOWER, SUPER TEA, the Bubble Bottle Design, and the accompanying logos are trademarks of POM Wonderful LLC or its affiliates. 17210921.02

Congratulations Bill Laliberte, on your outstanding career achievements and your well deserved retirement.

Cheers to your leisure years

-Your friends at Perimeter Sales & Merchandising-



Southern California

Brad Martin

bradmartin@perimetersm.com

Pat McDowell

patmcdowell@perimetersm.com

Jon Gerondale

jongerondale@perimetersm.com

Mike Rodriguez

mikerodriguez@perimetersm.com

John Harrington

jharrington@perimetersm.com

Northern California

Bruce Britt

brucebritt@perimetersm.com

Teri Allen

teriallen@perimetersm.com

Meg Allen

meg@perimetersm.com

Alyssa LaVielle

alysa@perimetersm.com

SERVING ALL OF CALIFORNIA

So. Cal 714-821-8396 www.perimetersm.com No. Cal 501-512-2110