

Potatoes and Vegetables Growers Association: Van Haren enters WPVGA hall of fame

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Pest Management Specialist Randy Van Haren, who established Pest Pros, Inc. of Plainfield, in 1984, was inducted into the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association (WPVGA) Hall of Fame at the industry's Annual Awards Banquet held February 8, 2023, in Stevens Point.

The WPVGA Hall of Fame honors lifetime achievement in the development of the state's potato industry. It is the intention of the WPVGA to continue to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the potato industry in Wisconsin by making annual Hall of Fame inductions.

Van Haren was born in Spokane, Washington, to Don and Ellie Van Haren. The family moved to Madison in 1955, where he and his three brothers and two sisters were raised. Randy attended the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison where he received a bachelor's degree in natural science in 1979, and a master's of entomology in 1984.

He worked as a research specialist in the UW-Madison Department of Horticulture from 1980-1984, including working on the pilot Vegetable Integrated Pest Management (IPM) initiative and Mint IPM project. Dr. Walt Stevenson hired Randy as a crop scouting intern working out of the Hancock Agricultural Research Station, in 1980. Dr. Jeff Wyman hired him as an IPM research specialist in 1981 and brought him into the master's program in Entomology, in 1983.

Randy established Pest Pros, Inc. and has worked with many potato and vegetable growers over the last 39 years. Pest Pros is a crop consulting and plant disease

diagnostic lab including a Potato Early Dying Assay to predict wilt potential.

In 2012, Randy sold Pest Pros to Wisconsin River Co-op, which merged in April of 2013 with Farmers' Co-op Supply & Shipping Association of West Salem. The new operation has been named Allied Cooperative.

In addition to his 39 years of work as a pest management specialist, Randy was the owner/operator of Willow Creek Aquaculture, a producer of feed-trained yellow perch fingerlings for 10 years in the late 1990s to the early 2000s.

Active both locally and nationally, Randy served as the President and Secretary of the Wisconsin Association of Professional Agricultural Consultants. He was the newsletter editor for the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants. He also served on the WPVGA Associate Division Board of Directors, including a term as Secretary. He is a Past President and current Secretary of the Plainfield Lions Club and has been a member since 1986. He is also a lifetime member and alumni of the Future Farmers of America in Plainfield.

Randy received a WPVGA Industry Appreciation Award in 1994 in response to his outstanding service during a late blight epidemic. He also received the Melvin Jones Fellowship in 2021, a public service award from the Lions Club International recognizing a tremendous contribution to humanity.

Randy has been married to his wife, Cindy, for 38 years. They have a son, Ben (wife Emma) and grandson, Theodore, who live in Westfield, and a daughter, Abby, who lives in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

He lists his hobbies as guitar, alpine and cross-country skiing, road bike cycling, hiking the National Ice Age Trail, and linoleum block print art. He has served on the WPVGA Research Committee for over 25 years and continues to work with countless growers on pest management for their potato and vegetable crops. Known for his perpetual smile and positive attitude, Randy has truly shown a lifelong commitment to excellence for the betterment of the Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry.