

In Memoriam

Vernon Wickstrom

Vernon "Vern" Wickstrom, Hilmar, Calif., 90, passed away on June 24, 2023.

He was born in Turlock, Calif., on February 17, 1933, the eldest child of the late Oliver and Elvera (Carlson) Wickstrom. He lived his entire life in Hilmar. He graduated from Hilmar High School in 1950 and then earned a dairy science degree from the University of California-Davis in 1952. While in school, he traveled home on the weekends to help his father with the dairy farms and completed the Army training course as well. He attained the rank of private first class, which behooved him when he headed to boot camp at Fort Ord. Vern served with the 25th infantry in the Korean War and was stationed on the 34th parallel of the Demilitarized Zone.

On his weekend trips home from college, Vern also faithfully attended church. Here, a beautiful brunette singing in the choir, Mary Ann Olds, caught his eye. The two married in 1956 and eventually raised two children on the family farm.

Vern took over the family dairy operation from his father and then passed it to his son, Tim, and grandson, Aaron. Today, the farm is operated as Wickstrom Dairy LP and Valsigna Dairy. The farm includes 1,000 acres of row crops and 2,400 milking cows.

Vern is one of the original 12 founders and owners of Hilmar Cheese Company and a charter member of Project Equity.

He actively served the local and dairy communities. He was a member of the American Jersey Cattle Association and the California Jersey Cattle Association. He was president of Merced County Farm Bureau, director of the Dairy Employers Association of California, district chair for Western United Dairyman, and a member of the California Milk Advisory Board. He served on the Emanuel Hospital board when they approved the construction of the new hospital in Turlock and sat on the board of the Turlock Land Bank Association, which eventually became Yosemite Farm Credit. He was also active with the Hilmar Chamber of Commerce, which named Mary and him Citizens of the Year. Vern was also honored by the Merced County Old Timers Association in 2022.

He proudly served his country and recently mourned the many freedoms

that seem to be slipping away. He was a committed Christian who loved his Lord and showed his faith in the way he treated others. He was a lifelong member of Hilmar Covenant Church, where he served as church chairman, Sunday school teacher, and member of the deacon board.

Vern and Mary loved to travel the world and cruise waterways. They were blessed to travel to Israel with their daughter and grandson and to Ireland, his favorite country, where their companions were his sister and brother-in-law.

Vern will be remembered for his heart-warming smile and ready laugh, deep blue eyes, generous bear hugs, and soft smell of cologne. He enjoyed keeping in touch with friends on Facebook and playing Solitaire on his phone. His favorite events were visits from his great-grandchildren, who loved their Papa and brought him much joy. But Vern was a kid magnet wherever he went.

In addition to his wife of 66 years, Mary, son and daughter-in-law, Tim and Carol Wickstrom, and grandson, Aaron, he is survived by a daughter Jill Wickstrom Heath; four other grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; a sister, Valerie (Don) Sorensen, Willow Park, Texas, a brother Dale (Marta) Wickstrom, Hilmar, a sister-in-law, Pat Wickstrom, Hilmar, and a brother-in-law, Bill Pace, Tucson, Ariz.; and many nieces, nephews, and cousins.

He was preceded in death by a baby sister, Marlys Wickstrom, a sister Eunice (Wickstrom) Pace, and a brother, Duane Wickstrom.

Memorials may be made to SmileTrain, (<https://donate.smiletrain.org/givenow>) or Hilmar Covenant Church (<https://www.hilmarcovenant.org/giving>.)

Rodney Bollenbacher

Rodney "Rod" Bollenbacher, Cedar Lake, Ind., 55, passed away unexpectedly on June 25, 2023, surrounded by his loving family.

He was born in Decatur, Ind., the son of Dennis (Judy) Bollenbacher and Sandy (Larry) Wellman. He attended South Adams High School and played with the basketball team that won the sectionals crown in 1986. After hitting the key basket with seven seconds left, he was quoted as saying, "We went in as a team and won as a team." He played basketball for the University of St. Francis as well and eventually coached basketball. He earned an MBA from

Keller School of Business.

Rod became a professional wrestler and promoter. He participated in the World Wrestling Federation, POWW Entertainment, and other organizations, first as Lighting Rod and then "Hot Stuff" Rod Bell. Recently, he was inducted into the POWW Hall of Fame. He was also president of New Wave Professional Wrestling and opened its Hardcore Professional Wrestling School in Lake Station, Ind.

For 22 years, Rod also worked for Wendy's International as a district manager and most recently as a franchise market consultant.

Rod was also an integral part of the team that operated Bolle-Acres Jersey Farm, Argos, Ind., owned by his brother and sister-in-law, Max and Carrie Jo, and their family. Among his joys was helping with the show string. He also owned several prize-winners in partnership with other Jersey breeders, including Freedom Lane Kid Rock Gisele-ET, the 2022 All American Spring Heifer Calf, and Kash-In Joel Knockin Boots-ET, the 2022 Junior All American Summer Yearling. His last gift of labor was clipping cows for the herd appraisal in the week before his passing. The effort paid off with four new Excellent-94% cows and several other cows scored 90 points or higher for the Bollenbachers.

Rod loved to travel by car, but also enjoyed spending time at home and on the farm and watching his kids play sports. He had a broad range of interests, from the stock market to hiking the mountains to watching ESPN and following his favorite NFL players. Some of his favorite foods were crab legs, steak, and butter pecan ice cream, along with Chinese and Mexican food. He listened to AC/DC and podcasts. He could be counted on to support a cause and went above and beyond with everything he approached. Overall, he was "living the dream."

In addition to his parents and brother and sister-in-law, Rod is survived by his loving wife, Lori Bollenbacher, two children, Nick and Madison Bollenbacher; and siblings, Scott (Jill) Bollenbacher, Jared Bollenbacher, Jenny Wellman, Carri (Andy) Miller, and Bob Wellman.

He was preceded in death by a brother, Greg Bollenbacher.

Dr. Robert C. Dreisbach

Dr. Robert C. "Doc" Dreisbach, Mercer, Pa., passed away at his home on July 1, 2023.

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He was born on October 29, 1927, to the late Louis and Ide (Foell). After serving in World War II, he graduated from the University of Maryland and then the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School.

Doc was a self-employed veterinarian for five decades. His practice was based in southeastern Pennsylvania for 15 years, while he was a contract veterinarian for the Graterford State Prison. Here, he also served as a visiting instructor for veterinary students from the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1970, he moved to Hamburg, Pa., where he established a practice and developed a well-known herd of Registered Jerseys with his wife, Helene. For 34 years, the two operated Wilderness Jerseys on Long Meadows Farm. The herd consistently ranked among the best in the country for genetic merit and production and sent several bulls to A.I. The Dreisbachs were early supporters of Project Equity, to fund National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ), and sponsored the Premier Performance Awards at the All American Junior Jersey Show for many years.

The Dreisbachs were known for the practices of mob feeding of calves and intensive rotational grazing, which began in 1990 as a desire for change and an experiment of rotating heifers through pastures every week during the summer. With its success, the milking string was eventually transitioned to intensive grazing and 1999. Over the years, the Dreisbachs hosted pasture walks to show others how to achieve high levels of production with a grazing system. Long Meadows Farm hosted the national Jersey organization's "Improving the Bottom Line" program in 2004.

Wilderness Jerseys was dispersed in May 2004, with a \$10,000 high seller and 68 buyers from 14 states and the West Indies making purchases. The Dreisbachs then moved to a lake house in Mercer in northwest Pennsylvania.

Doc and Helene have been strong supporters of the dairy industry. He headed the effort to promote Project Equity in Pennsylvania in its early years and the two were featured on CBS *This Morning* as advocates for dairy pricing support. They were awarded the Berks County Public Relations in Agriculture Award in 2002. They received the Distinguished Service Award from the Pennsylvania Jersey Cattle Association (PJCA) in 1997 and the American Jer-

sey Cattle Association (AJCA) in 2009. The two were impactful in planning the AJCA-NAJ annual meetings hosted by Pennsylvania in 1985 and 2005. Helene served two terms as AJCA director and was a director-at-large for NAJ.

Doc was president of the Bucks-Montgomery Veterinarian Association, director of their milk marketing cooperative, and a member of the local planning commission and FFA advisory board. He was also a 4-H leader for veterinary science projects.

The Dreisbachs were very involved with the PJCA, seldom missed an AJCA-NAJ annual meeting, and traveled extensively as members of the World Jersey Cattle Bureau. Both daughters, Patty and Carol, served as National Jersey Queens.

In addition to his family, Doc's great loves were farming and veterinary medicine, and he felt blessed to have spent his life doing both.

In addition to his wife of 59 years, Helen, he is survived by four children, Douglas (Alexandra), Turtle Creek, Pa., Dyan, San Francisco, Calif., Patricia Stroup, Montreux, Switzerland, and Carol (Brett) Ward, Mercer; and numerous well-loved grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by two brothers, Lewis and Harry, and a son, Karl.

Memorials may be made to Mercer Area Library, 110 E. Venango St., Mercer, PA 16137, or Hamburg Area Historical Society, 102 State Street, Hamburg, PA 19526.