

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Memorializing a Scientist-Poet

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The recently inaugurated Francis Kwong Center at PanAmerican Seed's Linda Vista Farm 2 in Costa Rica commemorates the company's former Director of Production Research, who passed away from colon cancer in July of 2017 at the age of 65. The new post-harvest laboratory, which is more than 30% larger than the one it replaces, features the latest in seed cleaning and grading technologies, allowing PanAmerican to process nearly all the corporation's billions of flower seeds on-site before sending them north to West Chicago, Illinois, for final processing and packaging.

Francis' 30-plus year career with PanAmerican left an indelible mark on the company where he pioneered many practices and new seed crops, such as angelonia, calibrachoa and New Guinea impatiens.

"He was absolutely key in working with all of our farms to help them to consistently produce high-quality seed across an extremely wide and challenging group of products," said PanAmerican Seed President Anne Leventry, who worked closely with Francis. "He was the worldwide leader in his field in the flower seed industry."

But more than that, "he had the mind of a scientist and the heart of a poet," reflected Anna Ball, chairman and CEO of Ball Horticultural Company, PanAmerican's parent company. "He had immense respect from everyone in the company."

One young employee who gained much from Francis' experience and tutelage is Arely Quiros Alpizar, the manager of the new facility. She's the product of a training program Ball has instituted to mentor young employees who are suited for management positions.

"Francis was an incredible person because he took the time to teach me about simple concepts," Arely says. "Sometimes there are concepts that can be really difficult to understand from a book; he took the time to review

concepts about seed physiology or some process about the maturity of the [seed] capsules in the greenhouse. He also taught me how important it is to harvest in the good [right] moment. I really appreciated that.”

We asked her if she had any fond memories of her time with Frances. She recalls that when she was taking the management training program in West Chicago, Francis was the person who would pick her up at the hotel each morning. He was always asking if she wanted anything while in the states.

“I’d always say to him, ‘Can we go to Trader Joe’s?’” she said. That’s one of her favorite American stores and he was always willing to oblige. **GT**

Watch a video about the new seed lab at tinyurl.com/franciskwongcenter.