

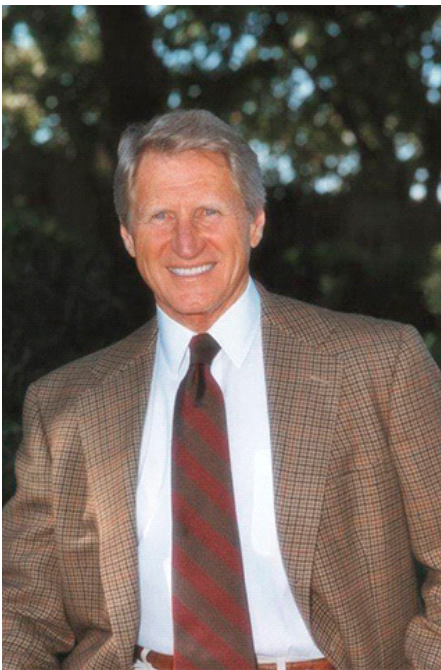
GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

6/30/2025

In Memorium: John T. Nickel

Jennifer Zurko



John T. Nickel, Chairman of the Board for Greenleaf Nursery Co., passed away peacefully in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on April 19 at the age of 89. He was a lifelong nurseryman, conservationist and philanthropist. Born on August 10, 1935 in Muskogee, Oklahoma, John grew up working in his parents' retail landscape nursery. At the age of 22, John established Greenleaf Nursery Company on Lake Tenkiller in Park Hill, Oklahoma.

As a young entrepreneur, John had the vision of growing plants in containers and creating a wholesale nursery that ships everywhere in the U.S. and Canada east of the Rockies. Today, Greenleaf Nursery Co. is one of the nation's largest wholesale producers of shrubs, trees and container plants with locations in Oklahoma, Texas and North Carolina.

In 1979, John partnered with his brother Gil to restore the nearly 100-year-old Far Niente Winery in Oakville, California. In 1997, the brand Nickel & Nickel began producing 100% varietal, single-vineyard wines. Their efforts resulted in placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

Because of his passion for nature, John donated 14,000 acres to The Nature Conservancy to ensure the land would remain pristine and undeveloped. Nestled in the rolling foothills of the Ozarks and overlooking the Illinois River, The J.T. Nickel Family Nature & Wildlife Preserve is the largest privately protected conservation area in the Ozarks and was officially dedicated in 2000. His business interests include Greenleaf Nursery Co., Greenland Investments and the Caney Creek Ranch.

John was named Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young in 1998. He was awarded The Nature Conservancy's first Oak Leaf Award and a Wildlife Stewardship Award from Nature Works in 2004. Another of John's long-held desires was realized in 2005 when a herd of native elk was reintroduced to the Nickel Preserve after being hunted out more than 150 years ago. John was inducted into the Tulsa Hall of Fame in 2007 and inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, Oklahoma's Highest Honor, in 2019.

John is survived by his wife Julie, his five children and his grandson. John also leaves behind many extended family members, as well as over 1,000 employees that John considered extended family. **GT**