

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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The Plug Doctor

Bill Swanekamp

I first met Dr. Dave Koranski in 1987 at a trade show sponsored by *GrowerTalks* called Grower Expo during the month of January in Illinois. It goes without saying that it was a bit cold in Illinois at that time of year.

Even though it was cold outside, that couldn't be said for the atmosphere inside—it was electric! Growers from all over the country and world were present to hear some of the best speakers in the country discuss pressing issues facing our industry.

One of the speakers present was Dr. Koranski. In 1987, he was the leading researcher in the U.S. on growing plugs. If you went to one of his seminars, you knew you would walk away with valuable information that could be applied immediately for improved plug production. In fact, his seminars were so packed that it ended up with standing-room-only.

Dave was an outstanding speaker who very seldom used his notes. He also was willing to help anyone who approached him with a growing question. It was unusual for him not to have the answer. That's why he was called "the Plug Doctor."



Pictured: The Ball Institute class of 1997. (Bill is standing front left.)

Sadly, on Thursday, October 1, he died. Dave served our industry for over 50 years and was devoted to the advancement of horticultural by sharing his knowledge with the next and the next and the next generation to come. Thank-fully, I was one of those individuals that learned a great deal from Dave. It started at Grower

Expo and continued for many years to come.

There was one outstanding seminar I attended that was taught by Dave and Dr. Roger Styer. This seminar was held in Parsippany, New Jersey from June 25-27, 1991. It was sponsored by the Ball Institute and Ken Tichelbaut was the director. Words cannot adequately relate the amazing information we received at that time. The theme of the seminar was "Media, Fertility and Water Quality Management." Step by step, Dave and Roger unraveled the relationship between these three components of growing. It was as if we were watching a masterpiece painting being drawn right in front of our eyes.

Keep in mind, this was being presented at a time when the interrelationship between these three variables wasn't

fully understood by our industry. Talk after talk caused mouths to drop open, and in some cases, eyes to be glazed over. Of the 25 growers in the audience, only a handful were actually keeping up with the science being presented. At the end of the three days of teaching, we went from growing by the seat of our pants to understanding the science of growing. Now we had the tools to successfully grow quality crops season after season because we understood how each variable affected the others. A profound “Eureka Moment.”

After the seminar, we came back to work and started to apply what we’d learned. It took us about three years to fully implement all the changes that were needed, but we did and today have confidence in our ability to grow beautiful crops year after year. It was like learning how to navigate a sailboat by constantly checking the heading and making course corrections as time went on. In the past, our growing was like a sailboat that had the compass heading fixed at the beginning and no course corrections were made once underway. Dave showed us how to make course corrections in the growing of our crops each and every week.

A few years after the 1997 seminar, Dave and I were asked to give a few talks together at OFA when it was called the Short Course. He and I worked together very well, and our seminars were well received.

Another outstanding quality Dave had was the ability to diagnosis plant issues with just a quick visual perusal of the plant. He demonstrated this at the 1997 seminar when he asked each grower to bring a plant to the class and he would diagnosis its problems. Most of us were amazed at his unique ability.

It’s always sad to see one of our industry leaders succumb to the curse of death, but Dave will be remembered for a long time for his outstanding accomplishments for our industry. **GT**

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