

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

5/1/2022

## In Memoriam: Atlee Burpee

*Chris Beytes*

W. Atlee Burpee IV passed away in his sleep unexpectedly at his home in Pennsylvania on Monday morning, February 21. He was 65.

You'll no doubt recognize his famous name, but you may not have known the gentleman himself. The Burpee family had sold the business to General Foods long before then, in 1973, when Atlee was just 16, and by the time the Ball family acquired the company in 1991 he had already moved on to the commercial vegetable business.

Atlee was the great-grandson of the founder of the vegetable and flower seed giant, and was raised first on Warden Farm in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and later in Santa Barbara, California. Having the seed business coursing through his veins, he graduated from the University of California-Davis in 1979 with a degree in agricultural economics and a specialization in horticulture, after which he did kick off his career at Burpee, at both their Warminster, Pennsylvania, HQ and Santa Paula, California, breeding station, specializing in vegetables.

In 1985, Atlee joined Abbott & Cobb as a territory sales manager, then went to Stokes Seeds in the same position for two years before joining Sakata Seed, where he's been serving as an area sales manager for the Mid-Atlantic region.

Justin Davis, Sakata's sales and marketing director, wrote, "Atlee was an exceptionally talented and knowledgeable seedsman who built his career on the principles of courtesy, respect and commitment ... his true passion and love in life was his family. He was endlessly proud of [them] and was always showing pictures to colleagues while beaming with joy."

Besides his passion for the seed industry, Atlee was a life member of the Plymouth Fire Company and active volunteer firefighter. His hobbies evolved from rock climbing to cycling. In recent years, his sporting passion switched to ultra-marathons of 50 and 100 miles. His capstone feat was completing 242 miles in a six-day race.

Atlee is survived by his wife of 35 years, Deborah (Stetser) Burpee, his son, Lee Burpee, daughter Lisa (and Scott) Rafter, daughter Michelle Burpee (and Vince Orsini); and his sisters Gaye Burpee, Jeannetta Burpee, Carol Burpee, Emilie Burpee Ryan and Phoebe Burpee McGaw; four grandchildren and a raft of nieces and nephews. He's remembered by his family as a kind, easy-going, good-humored and gentle man. **GT**