

Ed and Helen Corning

2022 Inductees

Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers Hall of Fame

Snohomish County Dahlia Society would like to nominate Ed and Helen Corning to be included in the Hall of Fame.

Ed has been a pillar of our dahlia community. Known for his generosity, appreciated for his helpful attitude, and respected for a breadth of knowledge deepened by frequent travel and correspondence, Ed Corning was a much sought-after advisor in dahlia matters. A retired Seattle police captain, Ed began growing dahlias in 1944. In the early 1950s he joined the Seattle Dahlia Society and also the Snohomish County Dahlia Society. Over the decades he was instrumental in establishing high judging standards throughout the Northwest by conducting judging classes and seminars. His patience and helpful hints were appreciated by dahlia novices. Whether it was with a selection of tubers to get the beginners started or with a personal visit to their gardens, the benign, confident demeanor of Ed reassured the uncertain. After all, he helped many beginners develop into major growers. Ed could afford to be a bit smug. He demonstrated his abilities by being a consistent winner at dahlia shows in the region. An ADS Senior Judge of long standing, Ed knew what judges look for. And with several of his own introductions, most notably CANYON MIDNIGHT, CANYON PARK, CAITLIN, and LAVENDER FREESTYLE, he also made his mark among exhibitors and the dahlia-growing public.

Travel and photography were also part of Ed's lifestyle. On his trips he was always looking for better dahlias to bring back to the Northwest. His international friendships permitted local growers to share their knowledge with his visitors. The camera was a steady companion on Ed's travels. It was there to capture new varieties, to depict methods of cultivation, and to highlight show features. Wherever he roamed, Ed also sought to include photographs of the area's scenic attractions as well. Later, these collections were organized into the memorable programs that enlivened many dahlia society meetings. For more than a decade Ed was the sparkplug behind the PSDA's slide contest, soliciting, helping to select, and presenting the best dahlia slides of the year.

Ed was one of the founding fathers of the Federation. It was his calm logic that helped draft and shape the by-laws. He was a signatory of those same by-laws. And then it came to wooing societies to join. At first there was Washington State (a powerhouse society), Evergreen State (a fledgling society), Grays Harbor (a fledgling society), Puget Sound (just beginning to flex its wings). Ed lobbied hard for Snohomish County to join and in the end, he prevailed, mainly because he was so respected. Without SCDS the Federation probably would have faded away, but with its inclusion it added legitimacy to the new organization and tipped the scales in favor of the new parent group. The Federation owes a debt of gratitude to Ed for his efforts.

Because of Ed's travels, many overseas visitors came for the first time to Northwest shows. It was later, after meeting these growers, that Phil Traff began inviting them to be guest speakers at Federation-sponsored shows. Ed brought his guests to various gardens and introduced them

to Northwest growers. One prominent couple found out to their chagrin when they served one such group dinner, that corn is considered cattle food in England. It was from Ed's friend Derek Hewlett that we learned the value of zoo manure. He taught us that you put giraffe manure on the tall ones and elephant manure on the giants. Where else could we have learned these nuggets of information. Ed's friend Keith Hammett, from New Zealand, taught us breeding tips. Other guests shared their growing techniques.

Ed was a mentor to any and all growers who wanted his help. But his wife, Helen, was part of that team. It was she who opened her house to any dahlia grower who came seeking guidance. It was she who played hostess when Ed's overseas growers showed up on the doorstep. She was his partner and deserves to also be honored.