HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS NAMED
AT 80TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PAA

Don Kichefski was born and raised on a dairy farm in Rhinelander, Wisconsin area. He attended public schools (through high school) in the Rhinelander area. In October 1951, Don left the family dairy farm to work for the Wisconsin Potato Breeding program. During the first three years with the breeding program, Don attended the Farm Short Course offered by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
Essentially Don had only one career. For forty years, Don was manager of the UW-Lelah Starks Potato Breeding Farm at Rhinelander, Wisconsin, working first with Dr. Gus Rieman and later with Dr. Stan Peloquin. In this role, Don had sole responsibility for the day to day operations of the breeding farm, a role which required combining hard work and long hours with often limited resources in order to make it all work. His dedication, capabilities and competence soon led to an increased role for Don in the Wisconsin breeding effort. Don became responsible for the actual potato crosses and data collection at Rhinelander. He assisted in the evaluation of this material and in the selection of those lines to be advanced. Don was also responsible for Wisconsin's participation in the North Central Regional trials. This entailed sending and receiving seed samples to and from other cooperating states, planting and harvesting the plots and collecting and summarizing the necessary data. He also assisted with the Wisconsin Variety trials. Don also kept himself informed of variety development across North America by keeping in contact with other breeding programs. He often attended annual PAA meetings mainly to hear specific papers and to meet and talk with potato breeders from North America and other countries. All of this activity allowed Don to make important contributions in the area of variety development. He had a significant role in the development of such varieties as Wischip, Rhinered, Langlade and most notably Superior and Snowden. Both Superior and Snowden have had significant impacts on the nation’s potato industry.

Don also made significant contributions in the area of training graduate students. Many graduate students would spend summers at Rhinelander pursuing their individual research efforts. Don cooperated fully with these students and he became a mentor for many of them. He helped them develop good, solid field plot techniques and taught them the “art” of potato breeding. Perhaps his greatest contribution in this area was teaching the importance of critical observation which forms the basis of good evaluation and selection techniques. His mentoring work with graduate students has had subtle but significant impacts on potato research both nationally and internationally.

Finally Don contributed significantly in the area of outreach to the potato industry particularly with Wisconsin chip processors and seed growers. He willingly shared data and varietal information both within and outside of Wisconsin. Don was particularly amenable to providing seed of advance selections to both seed growers and chippers so that evaluations could be obtained in a more commercial setting. Don worked closely with chip processors to insure that new selections would meet their needs for high solids and chipping directly from storage. In latter years, he began developing and evaluating russet selections. Don always participated in the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Seed Potato Improvement Association’s to report on varietal development. Seed growers valued Don’s judgment and respect to the potential of new selections whether from the Wisconsin breeding program or from other programs.