



## **Edwin B. Oyer**

June 18, 1927 – November 15, 2016

The [Horticulture Section](#) in the [School of Integrative Plant Science](#) (formerly Department of Horticulture, formerly Department of Vegetable Crops), and the [Office of International Programs](#) in the [College of Agriculture & Life Sciences](#) lost a dear friend and colleague with the passing of Edwin Burnell Oyer at the age of 89 on November 15, 2016 in Ithaca, New York. Many people in these units, and throughout [Cornell University](#) and the world, will always remember the kindness, expertise, and wise counsel they received from Ed during his professional life and beyond. Chris Wien, International Professor Emeritus of Horticulture, remembers Ed as a most kind, generous and outgoing man, who had sincere interest in fostering international agricultural development.

Ronnie Coffman, the current director of International Programs, remembers Ed at many junctures in his career, starting from his first recollection dating back to 1971 when he arrived in [Los Baños, Philippines](#) to take up his new post as a rice breeder at the [International Rice Research Institute \(IRRI\)](#). Ed was serving as the last Director of the University of the Philippines Cornell (UPCO) project. The project had operated very successfully for 20 years, but it had been agreed by all concerned that it was time for Cornell to move on and leave the [University of the Philippines at Los Baños \(UPLB\)](#) to its business. Winding things down was a delicate matter, so Cornell had sent Ed, one of its most diplomatic administrators, to do the job. He was more than up to the task. Professor Ruben Villareal, who eventually served as Chancellor of UPLB, remembers Ed as "...so intelligent that he could discuss anything under the sun as if he was simply plucking ripe grapes from the vine. He seemed to have a complete grasp of varied subject matter and could offer solutions to every challenge presented to him." It was clear that Ed's colleagues at UPLB and IRRI respected him tremendously.

Bob Herdt, Adjunct Professor in Agricultural Economics and International Agriculture, shared office space with Ed and remembers him for his generous, humble, cheerful attitude toward life. Ed was always ready to share recollections of his career and bits of wisdom he had accumulated over the years. His grandchildren described him as authentically curious with a knack for expressing the genuine; an extremely loving grandfather who read the books of their choosing so that he could have more meaningful conversations with them. These were some of the traits that endeared him not only to family and friends but to colleagues of many cultures worldwide.

Ed was born in [Ft. Wayne, Indiana](#) on June 18, 1927 to Eli J. and Minnie L. Oyer. After graduating from Central High School in Ft. Wayne in 1945, when [World War II](#) was nearing its end, he joined the U.S. Navy and served on [Guam](#) in the Pacific Ocean theatre. Although raised a [Mennonite](#) in the pacifist tradition, Ed felt compelled to defend his country because of the aggressiveness of the attack on [Pearl Harbor](#). After completing his military service, he attended Purdue University and received B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from that university. Following completion of his studies, Edwin joined the faculty of the Department of Vegetable Crops in the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University in February 1955. He was awarded a NATO Fellowship in Science in 1961 to conduct vegetable research at Le Phytotron in Gif-sur-Yvette, France. He joined Purdue University's [Department of Horticulture](#) as a faculty member from 1963 to 1966 after which he returned to Cornell as Chair of the Department of Vegetable Crops.

His experiences in international agriculture began in 1971 when he was tapped by Cornell to serve as the final Project Leader of the Graduate Education Program of the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture – Cornell University (UPCO) Project that ended a 20-year collaboration between these two institutions of higher learning. While in the Philippines he was invited to join the late Robert F. Chandler, Jr. in the establishment of the [Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center \(AVRDC\)](#) on Taiwan where he served as Deputy Director of Research while on leave-of-absence from Cornell from 1972 to 1974. He returned to Cornell as Director of the International Agriculture Program in July 1974.

The attraction of Southeast Asia was too strong to resist and Ed resigned from Cornell in January 1977 to join the newly established International Agricultural Development Service where he served as the Project Leader for a World Bank financed project to establish the [Indonesia Agency for Agricultural Research and Development \(IAARD\)](#). Dr. Sugiono Moeljopawiro remembered Ed's extraordinary contribution to the establishment of IAARD in the form of accessing and training human resources. Ed identified some 190 young scientists to receive English language training before sending them for degree programs abroad. This assignment extended to September 1982 when he returned to Cornell once again to resume his position as Director of the International Agricultural Program in which he served until he took semi-retirement in 1987 and fully retired in 1992.

In addition to a distinguished career, Ed led an exceptional life. He was a good man in the deepest and best sense of that phrase, someone beloved by his family, a man who was rarely moved by anger but often by kindness. Ed was deeply interested in the world he lived in. His wide-ranging interests encompassed literature, politics, global economics, the New York Yankees, Denver Broncos and much more. He could talk about all of these subjects with equal

knowledge and enthusiasm and he maintained a keen intellect and curiosity throughout his life. He was a practical man, some might even say he was a serious man, but Ed always had a ready laugh and a generous spirit, especially when his grandchildren (and grand-dogs) were around. For family and those who knew him, his passing diminishes the world. Ed was eternally optimistic and, as such, will live on as an inspiration to us all as we face the future.

Ed is survived by his loving and beloved wife of 64 years, the former Mary Ann Jones. They met at Purdue on a blind date in November of 1949 and quickly discovered that they were well matched in their conservative family backgrounds. Mary Ann's great grandmother was Amish and spoke only German. Mary Ann was the fourth generation to live on the farm established by her great grandparents in [Tippecanoe County](#), IN in 1860. They had two daughters, Ann Oyer (Tom) Keith of Ft. Collins, Colorado and Janet Oyer (Kevin) Van Cleave of Los Alamos, New Mexico; four grandchildren, Megan Oyer Keith of Berkeley, California, Amy Glenn Keith of Denver, Colorado, Cameron Van Cleave of Fort Collins, Colorado and Ryan Van Cleave of Los Alamos, New Mexico. His only sibling, a sister, Naomi Oyer Pollitt predeceased him.

*Written by Ronnie Coffman (Chair), Chris Wien and Robert Herdt*