



Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame
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Credentials Released for 2024 Wilson County Ag Hall of Fame Inductees

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Credentials have been released for the 2024 Wilson County Ag Hall of Fame Inductees. The Seventeenth Annual Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame Banquet will take place on April 2, 2024 in the Wilson County EXPO Building at the Ward Agricultural Center in Lebanon with a reception at 6:00 pm and the actual banquet at 6:30 pm. Area FFA and 4-H Members will serve as ushers for the evening. The following individuals will be part of the sixteenth class of inductees:

Bill & Cheryl Ligon

Bill Ligon was born, raised and still lives and farms the bicentennial land that his original ancestor, John Cloyd, staked in 1789 as a Revolutionary War land grant in the Mt Juliet community. Growing up on the farm, his family raised purebred Poland China hogs, Hampshire sheep and Shorthorn cattle. They also grew wheat, oats, barley, milo and hay. Bill is the son of Herschel and Lillie Eller Ligon. His father was inducted into the Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2008. Bill graduated from Mt Juliet High School in 1969. He was on many FFA judging teams during high school and obtained his American Farmer degree in 1969. He also played basketball during high school. He enrolled in the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where he double majored in Animal Science and Agriculture Education. While obtaining his BS degree, he was on the UT Meat Judging team and was second high individual in the southeastern contest and eighth high individual in the national contest held in Madison, Wisconsin. The following year, he was on the UT Livestock Judging team, where he was the high individual in the southeastern contest held at Mississippi State University and ninth high individual in the national contest held at the famous Chicago Stockyards. While at UT, he was also in the FarmHouse Fraternity, Army ROTC and vice-president of the Block and Bridle Club. While in ROTC, he was a “Distinguished Military Graduate.” Bill served in the US Army Reserves and obtained the rank of Captain. After completing officer basic training at Fort Lee, VA, he was offered the opportunity to manage the hog and sheep operation at UT Blount Farm while getting

his MS degree in Animal Science. His thesis was on “Comparison of Pasture versus Confinement Raising of Baby Pigs.” After graduation, he worked as a Livestock Extension Agent in eastern North Carolina. After two and a half years, he felt the need to return to Middle Tennessee to help his father on the farm. While helping his father on the farm, Bill taught Agriculture Education at Westmoreland High School for 16 years. He then decided to move to Watertown High School and taught for an additional fourteen years. In 1980, Bill married Cheryl Summers, the “redheaded city girl” that lived across the fence. They were married 40 years until cancer took her life. Even though Cheryl had been a “city girl” she was always a working partner on the farm. She took care of bottle feeding the orphan lambs and transported sheep to Vanderbilt Medical Hospital where they were used for medical research. Cheryl helped Bill’s father with the hog operation. She was very involved with the ewe flock during lambing season, often caring for the newborn lambs. She was also a fulltime housewife and mother while working on the farm. After retiring from teaching, Bill continued full-time on the farm. He raises purebred Poland China hogs that started with his grandfather in 1916. He continues to raise sheep which were used in medical research trying to find cures for such conditions as crib death and spina bifida. The family also produces lespedeza hay for horse owners. When his son, Andy, was in 4-H, the family started raising Golden Comet hens and selling brown eggs, Currently the flock numbers about 500 hens. Over the years, Bill has judged numerous swine shows as well as cattle and sheep shows.

Johnnie Ricketts

Johnnie Gershon Ricketts was born August 4, 1946, to Hall and Louise Ricketts. Johnnie was raised on a Grade A dairy farm on Central Pike. Johnnie graduated from Mt Juliet High School, where he played football and basketball, was an officer in the FFA and was vice president of his senior class. After graduation, Johnnie wanted to partner with his dad in dairy farming, but his dad recommended he choose another business due to smaller dairies around the area going of business. His father’s advice was to “get a good job with a retirement. “In August of 1964, Johnnie went to work at the Ford Motor Glass Plant, but he wanted to stay connected to agriculture, so he rented some pasture ground and started a beef herd. In 1966 his parents moved to the family farm on Posey Hill Rd, Mt Juliet. In 1967 Johnnie purchased twenty-five acres in the same area to begin his own farm. In 1970, he married Gayla Carter, and they have two daughters. Both daughters and their families also have homes on the family farm. Johnnie worked two full-time jobs for 37 years. He worked at Ford Motor Glass Plant and farmed until he retired in 2001. During this time, he managed four hundred plus acres which included his land and land he leased. He raised beef cattle and produced hay. Due to health problems, he now has forty-five head of beef cattle and produces hay on 143 acres. Johnnie has served his community in many capacities. He has served on the board of directors for the Wilson County Co-op and the Wilson County Livestock Association. He has served on the Wilson Bank and Trust Community Council, Gladeville. He served as a member of the University of TN Extension Agricultural Committee. He has also served on the Wilson County Board of Zoning and Appeals and the Wilson County Planning Commission. He was selected to by the TN Farmers CO-OP to participate in the “Big Picture Leadership Advance Tour” and by the Middle Tennessee Electric Membership Board to participate in the MTEMC Young Leaders Conference. After retiring from Ford Motor Glass Plant, Johnnie

also worked at the Wilson County Livestock Market with Alvin McKee. He loved greeting the many farmers on sale day. He referred to himself as the “Wilson County Sale Barn Greeter. Johnnie has been a member of Gladeville Baptist Church his entire life. He has taught Sunday School, served on many committees, and now has the honor of being a Lifetime Deacon. He believes in Faith, Family and Farming.

Don Simpson

Don Simpson was born in Watertown, TN on December 11, 1934, to parents Roy and Irene (Davis) Simpson. The Simpson Family owned and operated a Grade-A Dairy Farm in Watertown. Don graduated from Watertown High School in 1954. Then, in 1958, he completed work at Middle Tennessee State University with a degree in Social Science and Economics. After a brief teaching career in Wilson County, Don was selected by Governor Frank G. Clement to serve with the State of Tennessee as a Regional Director of Industrial Development. It was during this period that Don worked toward and received a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the YMCA Law School by attending night classes. In 1965, Don was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Wilson County Court Clerk, Curry Dodson, following the Clerk’s unexpected death. Don was re-elected to the position where he served for the next nine years. This marked the beginning of his life in politics with service and commitment to the community. In 1974, Don was elected County Judge where he would serve for the next 20 years. Over time, the title and responsibilities of the job would change, but the lessons of hard work, teamwork and commitment learned on the farm always served as Don’s “North Star”. All the years Don was involved in education, industrial development, and the administration of county government, he never forgot the farm – land, cattle, and horses. When Don and Peggy married in 1965 and were living in Lebanon, they began planning their future which included a farm of their own. When Mr. Roy’s dairy was dispersed, the farm operation changed to beef cattle, basically Hereford cattle. Don bought some acreage that joined Mr. Roy’s farm and built a barn. He and Peggy bought a cow a piece-- thus a beginning a partnership and a herd – a herd of Hereford!!! Later in the early 70’s they built a house on the farm, making Watertown their home. Don has enlisted and received farm help and support from his nephew, George Simpson, his neighbors, and countless Ag and FFA students at Watertown High School. Don was a former member of the Lebanon Jaycees and the Lebanon Sportsman Club. He was president of the Lebanon Lion’s Club (1973-74) and the Lebanon Wilson County Chamber of Commerce (1973). He was also a member of the Wilson County Livestock Association, the Wilson County Horseman’s Association, and Wilson County Promotions where he served as Chairman of the Mule Show for many years. Additionally, he served 10 years on the Wilson County Election Commission.

Nelson Steed

Nelson Steed was a cherished figure, remembered fondly as a devoted father, grandfather, Christian, businessman, and agriculturalist. His roots lay in Shop Springs, where he began life in a sharecropper family, a testament to his humble beginnings. His family moved several times before settling in LaGuardo, off Cairo Bend, during his freshman year of high school. It was here that Buck Evans, an agriculture teacher, became a significant influence on him, instilling a deep love for farming. Nelson was industrious from a young age, always finding ways to cultivate whatever crops could bring in some income. After graduating from Lebanon High School, Nelson married Emmie Lou, then enlisted in the National Guard. Together, they moved to the Grave-Wright farm, a property that had been in Emmie Lou’s family. This move marked the

beginning of Nelson's venture into the construction business, where he specialized in building custom homes. Despite his burgeoning career in construction, Nelson never strayed far from his agricultural roots, engaging in truck farming. He and Emmie Lou had two children (Connie Jo Massey & Donnie Steed), and together, they started a venture in raising hogs, managing to balance the demands of business with the responsibilities of raising a family on the farm. In the 1970s, Nelson became a charter member of the Wilson County Promotion, initially established to host an agricultural fair. His involvement was instrumental, serving as vice president for over thirty years and playing a pivotal role in transforming the Wilson County Fair into the celebrated event it is today. Nelson's career took another significant turn when he entered the banking industry, eventually becoming the chairman of Cedar Stone Bank. In this capacity, he was a staunch advocate for farmers, recognizing the importance of supporting their needs in a rapidly changing agricultural landscape. Upon retiring, Nelson, with the support of his family, expanded his farming operation significantly. His efforts culminated in the development of a USDA meat processing facility, marking another milestone in his remarkable career. Nelson's legacy lives on through his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, who continue to operate the farm and uphold the values he cherished.

“The purpose of the Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame is to recognize citizens of Wilson County who have made a significant impact on agriculture in Wilson County, Tennessee, nationally or worldwide” states Keith Harrison, the Chairman of the Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame. “We feel the time is right to pay tribute to these very deserving individuals. Each has made significant contributions to Wilson County Agriculture, as well as Wilson County in general.”

Other members of the Board of Directors of the Wilson County Agriculture Hall of Fame are Jeffrey Turner-Vice Chairman, Ruth Correll-Secretary, Diane Major-Treasurer, Ben Powell, Louis Fletcher, Isabel Hall, Lucas Holman & Neal Oakley. The organizers have established a non-profit status for the organization to enable them to raise money to be used for a building on the Ward Agricultural Center to be dedicated to the individuals inducted into the Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame. “Any funds raised over and above the costs of putting on the annual banquet will be set aside for the building,” states Jeffrey Turner, Vice Chairman of the Hall of Fame,

Tickets for the April 2 banquet can be purchased by calling 444-1890 ext. 3. The cost is \$30 each. Jordan's Catering will be preparing the meal that evening, which is another reason to join in on the festivities. “We want folks to come together to recognize these deserving individuals on April 2,” says Harrison. “We owe these folks a great deal of gratitude for everything they have done for agriculture.”

For info on the Wilson County Ag Hall of Fame, visit www.wilsoncountyaghalloffame.org.