



The Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame was formed in Year 2000 to recognize and honor distinguished individuals that have made significant contributions to the agricultural community in the Greater Franklin County region and its immediate surrounding areas; although nominees from neighboring counties of Franklin County within a 150-mile radius are often also considered for this prestigious award.

The Pasco Chamber Board has proudly created a Selection Committee comprised of quality individuals representative of our agriculture industry and has chartered them with the honorable task of reviewing all nomination submittals. Induction candidates are selected based on their outstanding performance in the agriculture industry and their bountiful support of the local and rural communities. Candidates are recognized by their peers for not only their dedication, generosity, and selflessness, but also their demonstrated achievements, noteworthy expertise, and creative innovations that often provide a legacy of impactful results and lasting benefit to the overall enhancement of the local agricultural industry and community at large. Farmers, growers, ranchers, and owners/employees of agribusiness firms are all eligible for nomination as either individuals and/or families.

The Ag Hall of Fame inductions will be presented at a special gala January 18, 2024 at the Pasco Red Lion. *Deadline for Application is November 1, 2023*

### Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame Intent to Nominate

Nominee's Name Walter and Marlene Neff (aka, Walt & Tonie)

Mailing Address 3425 Serena Lane, Pasco WA 99301

Nominee's Phone 509.544.9099 Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail gma.5grand@hotmail.com / neffrnch@bossig.com

Date of Birth 10/24/1948 & 02/08/1951 Birthplace Pasco, WA & Missoula MT

Date of Death (if deceased) \_\_\_\_\_

Nominator's Name The Neff & Hill Family

Phone 509.851.3610 Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail farmgirl.74@hotmail.com

Family Contact Melissa Neff Hill

Phone 509.851.3610 Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail farmgirl.74@hotmail.com

Pasco Chamber of Commerce

Mid-Columbia Ag Hall of Fame Nomination

Walter and Marlene Neff (aka, Walt and Tonie)

Walter was born October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1948 in Pasco Washington to Rogers and Ruth Neff. Walt grew up on the family ranch 17 miles outside of Pasco on the Pasco Kahlotus Highway. He attended Star School, a one room school house until the age of eight. The summer after Walt's eighth birthday, he moved to Spokane, Washington with his younger brother Donald Neff and Mother Ruth Neff. From the age of nine, Walt's summers were spent on the family farm learning the ropes right alongside the hired men (a lot of time spent hoeing weeds) with his younger brother Don and his father, Rogers Neff. It was during these formative years that Walt learned the value of a hard day's work, and taking pride in what you sow.

Walt hated school, but he loved to drive tractor. Walt would be so bored during class that he would often get caught daydreaming that he was driving a tractor. Walt learned to drive combine during the summer of his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday with his older brother Doug Neff. The first combine that Walt learned to drive was a 1955 John Deere Hillside with a yellow umbrella for shade, no cabs or air-conditioning in those days. One summer, after harvest, Walt was planting wheat and was making some noticeable skips. The skips were noticeable enough that his dad met him in the field, "mad as a wet hen". His father said, "I take pride in my work, but it is obvious from the road that you don't. You can go and treat wheat." He didn't drive tractor again for the next few days. Walt has never forgotten that and it shows in everything he does to this day.

In 1967 Walt graduated from University High School in Spokane Washington. In the fall of 1967 Walt studied welding at Columbia Basin College and received his Certified Welding Certificate. During this time he was recognized twice on the Presidents list, in April and again June, while attending CBC. After graduation, Walt went to work at the shipyards in Vancouver, WA and Portland, OR while a member of the Boiler Makers Union, building barges, bridges and an oil derrick platform for the state of Alaska. In the winter of 1969, Walt was drafted to serve with the United States Marines. Between 1969 and 1971, Walt completed basic training at Camp Pendleton, CA and was stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC and Charleston, SC at a Naval Base in the Marine Barracks. Walt's military leave was always spent back home on the Ranch, working side by side with his father and the hired men. It has been said, throughout the years, that it took 2 men to replace Walt when he was drafted. After two years of service, Corporal Neff returned home to the Family Ranch. November 1971 Walt met the love of his life Tonie.

Marlene "Tonie" was born February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1951 in Missoula Montana to Samuel and Connie Myers. Walt and Tonie met through a mutual friend while out on the town, dancing the night

away at the local Stakeout in Downtown Kennewick, WA... As they say, the rest is history. On February 14, 1972, three months after they met, Walt and Tonie married. They have been devoted to each other through all of life's challenges and triumphs for the past 51 plus years. Walt has been asked by complete strangers, "What is your secret to a long happy marriage?" he always says "Good Communication and Lots of Sex".

The generational tradition of the community service and involvement in organizations that promote area businesses and the agricultural industry was demonstrated for Walt and Tonie through family, friends and their church early on in their life. Walt and Tonie are both active leaders within the local community and in the agriculture industry. From 1971 to 2019 Walt was a volunteer firefighter and served as a captain and a fire commissioner for Franklin County District #5. For twelve years, both Walt and Tonie organized the Annual Franklin County Cattleman's Banquet, serving on the board and going through the "chairs". Over the years, they have been members of the Franklin County Wheat Growers Association, The Washington Association of Wheat Growers and the National Association of Wheat Growers.

In 1993 Walt graduated from the Washington Agriculture and Forestry Education Foundation Program, Class 14, after completing a two-year long leadership course. Walt has served on the board of the Pasco Chamber of Commerce and was President from 2006 to 2007. Both Walt and Tonie spearheaded the organization of the Annual Pasco Chamber of Commerce Presidents Banquet from 2004 to 2012. They have organized the Annual Washington Wheat Growers Auction for the past 25 years while serving as a board chairman.

Continuing with the Neff Family Tradition, in 1985, Walt and Tonie formed a partnership with his father Rogers Neff and his step mother Mildred Neff. The partnership continued until Roger's death after the harvest of 1993. Walt remembers his last conversation with his father fondly. Walt told his father that they had an above average, 53 Bushel year. Rogers was very pleased. He passed two days later.

In the fall of 2000, Walt and Tonie made the decision to start a new chapter in their life. They moved off the ranch and purchased their very first home in Pasco, WA. Even though they didn't live on the ranch anymore, you could still see Walt driving the 23 miles from their Pasco home to the Family Ranch every day. Tonie was never far behind running parts, driving truck, and anything else that was needed to keep the equipment cultivating the earth and the Ranch running smoothly.

In 2016 Walt and Tonie made the decision to continue with the Neff Family Tradition and formed a partnership with their son David and his wife Kim. The partnership continued until Walter's retirement in the fall of 2020.

Walt and Tonie have had the privilege of seeing five generations work the family ranch. Not too many can say they have had that opportunity.

Walt and Marlene Neff (aka, Walt & Tonie)

Community and Agricultural Services

Marine Corps, Camp Pendleton CA – 1969 to 1971

Volunteer Fireman – 1971 to 2019

Fire Captain, Franklin County Star District 5

Fire Commissioner, Franklin County Star District 5

Fire Commissioner, Franklin County Kahlotus District 2

President of the Franklin County Cattleman's Association

President of the Franklin County Cowbell Association

Joint Chairman of the Franklin County Cattlemen's Banquet

President of the Franklin County Association of Wheat Growers – 1999 to 2000

President of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Board member of the National Association of Wheat Growers and a member of the budget Committee

Board member of the Washington Wheat Foundation

Joint Chairman of the Washington Wheat Foundation Annual Auction

President of the Pasco Chamber of Commerce – 2006 to 2007

Joint Chairman of the Ag Hall of Fame and One of the Founding Members

Joint Chairman of the Annual Pasco Chamber of Commerce Past President Banquet (Sunshine Ball) Committee – 2004 to 2012

Joint Chairman of the Annual Pasco Chamber of Commerce Live and Silent Auction









STAR  
School

Ag  
Forestry  
CLASS  
#14







WALT &  
LONIS  
Sunshine  
Ball





WALT &  
Toni  
1970's





WALT  
MARINE  
CORPS