

# Ernie Grimo can be considered the Johnny Appleseed of the Ontario nut growing industry



*Founding president of the Society of Ontario Nut Growers (SONG) in 1972 and current president of the organization, Grimo has the same passion to improve and promote nut growing as the mythical apple propagator in colonial America.*

The 80-year-old retired elementary school teacher always had an interest in plants and flowers that produce edible seed.

“It was a passion that drove me on,” he said.

As a teacher for 35 years, he inculcated the value of plants and how to nurture seeds into multi-faceted uses to his students.

His enthusiasm was often infectious among generations of students. Grimo fondly recalls one student who grafted a tree for her family which many years later became a treasured table top after its lifetime.

Over the years he has donated about 10,000 trees from his classroom projects and today “see my trees all over area schools.”

Grimo also practised what he preached.

When he got married, Grimo built a house landscaped with about 100 nut and fruit trees. Tree nuts are a form of edible landscap-

ing, he said. In addition to their decorative attributes, growers can harvest their nuts and seeds for their own food.

Grimo turned a hobby into a business when he bought an 11 acre orchard near Niagara on the Lake in 1974 and then branched into the nursery business with four acres of nursery stock 25 years ago.

“My interest was in plants and flowers producing edible seed from not only nut trees, but apples, cherries, and raspberries.”

He has been actively involved in breeding and propagating nut trees for more than 45 years.

SONG’s annual general meeting will be held March 16 at the Simcoe Horticultural Research Station.

More than 30 people from southwestern Ontario are expected to attend to learn the latest

advances in tree growing. A new development on display will be an adaptation of a self propelled apple harvester converted to pick up hazel nuts.

Most SONG members are small acreage growers totalling about 50 acres of 15 varieties of nuts ranging from pines, chestnuts, beech and pecans. In recent years however, the commercial viability of hazel nuts has spawned an estimated 700 acres in cultivation.

Grimo was instrumental in the commercial development of hazel nuts and a couple of years ago was presented with the Award of Merit for outstanding contributions to the Ontario hazel nut industry. His daughter Linda, who took over the nut nursery in 1999, is a past chair of the Ontario Hazelnut Association. 🌱

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