

Agronomic Science Foundation

Training the Next Generation of Scientists while Honoring Two Giants

All good chemists begin in the sink. That's what Dr. Gary A. "Pete" Peterson learned when he worked with the late Robert A. Olson of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln during his student days. Since then, Dr. Peterson's research career has gone on to emphasize the application of soil science principles to the solution of field-related soil management problems.

Peterson is an ASA and SSSA Fellow, former SSSA president, and an emeritus professor and former head of the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences at Colorado State University where he teaches the senior seminar and sociology course entitled, "Soils, Environment and Society." As he looks to the future of soil science, he says our professional Societies must lead the efforts to focus the attention on young people beginning at the grade-school level. According to Peterson, we must also actively campaign with our university colleagues and students alike about the value of soil science classes and get them into the larger curriculum.

Recently volunteering to serve as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF), Peterson is spearheading a drive by Dr. Ken Frank, Dr. Richard Vanderlip, and Dr. David Whitney to work with ASF to raise \$25,000 for naming rights of a new training center at the Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Sciences (ACSESS) headquarters building in Madison, WI. The training center would be named after Olson and Iowa State University Emeritus Professor of Agronomy Dr. John Pesek. Peterson, Frank, Vanderlip, and Whitney all studied under these two giants in the field of soil science. They plan to use



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the money to equip the new facility with state-of-the-art equipment and other amenities.

"This is an investment in our future and a wonderful way to honor these two great scientists who have played such a major role in training today's soil scientists who are in turn passing that legacy on to the next generation," Peterson says.

Olson, who died in 1987, proved that excessive nitrogen fertilizer could actually hurt crop yield. He was one of the first to warn that improper use of fertilizer eventually would pollute ground water. In addition to his 38 years of teaching at the University of Nebraska, he was a consultant in Paris to the Organization for European



Robert Olson



John Pesek



A campaign is under way to raise \$25,000 for naming rights of a new training center at the ACSESS headquarters building in Madison, WI (above). The training center would be named after Dr. Robert Olson and Dr. John Pesek.

Economic Cooperation in 1958 and in Vienna in 1962 for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). He managed the Food for Hunger Campaign Fertilizer Program for the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome from 1967 to 1969 and was acting director of the Agricultural Division of the IAEA in Vienna from 1974-1975.

Dr. Pesek has enjoyed a long and distinguished professional career and made contributions in the areas of soil fertility, crop production, and the economics of soil fertilizer use, which have led to a better understanding of the effects of management practices on the environment and crop production. He was named a fellow of ASA, CSSA, SSSA, the Iowa Academy of Science, and AAAS. He served as president of both ASA and SSSA and helped establish the nation's first National Soil Tilth Center. He was named a Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor of Agriculture in 1981 and received the Agronomic Service Award in 1989.

Peterson says he always appreciated the straight-forward teaching style that connected Olson and Pesek so well with their students. Of Olson, Peterson says, "He is my academic father and was also my best supporter and critic. There weren't as many official mentors back in the day, but I always considered him mine. He went from professor to department head because he had an open door policy with everyone who wanted to see him. He taught me how to write concisely, which has significantly influenced my career."

If you would like to join the campaign to help introduce agronomy, crop science, or soil science to young people who are ready to choose a career path, consider becoming a mentor or a scholar and/or contributing financially. For more information, contact me at 608-273-8095 or abarton@sciencesocieties.org.