



## 2020 Honoree Mike Stricker



As a “rural kid” in Mount Vernon, Mike Stricker knew the value of hard work and determination. Upon graduation from East Knox High School in Howard, Ohio, Mike attended the Columbus Technical Institute before transferring to The Ohio State University. To pay his way through college, Mike worked 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week at the local oil drilling company in the summer and over the holidays. He later worked for his father-in-law, building homes for 8 hours a day, receiving family-rate payment. Mike realized additional employment was needed to help pay for his college education.

Thanks to the help of Duane Staats, Mike found a job at Landmark in Columbus in 1975. Mike started in the labor union at the Columbus terminal and moved his way up to assistant quality control foreman and night shift supervisor. After 5 years at Landmark, Mike was asked by then vice president of grain operations Howard Free to “do him a favor” and interview with an elevator in Mansfield. Though Mike was not looking to change jobs, he interviewed with Wayne Davis in 1980 and Wayne “convinced” Mike to come on board with Ohio Farmers. As Mike puts it: “Wayne taught me more about the grain business and agriculture than anybody else. He treated me like a professional and a human being – where family came first.”

After 5 years in this new position, Ohio Farmers and Landmark merged to create Countrymark. After this, Wayne brought a covered pile tarp to Mike to repair for the Ottawa Lake elevator in Michigan. Not long after this repair, Mike was asked to manage this location – a move he initially resisted, but eventually accepted. Feeling dissatisfied in his role after two years and learning that Wayne was retiring, Mike was ready to leave the agriculture industry, until fate stepped in. At a Toledo Board of Trade golf outing, Mike happened to share a golf cart with Larry Hammond. As Mike shared his plans to move out of agriculture, Larry told Mike he knew of someone

that could use a man like him – and quickly set up an interview with Al Holdren at the U.S. Commission Company in return for a promise to give Mike an interview if Larry found an elevator he wanted to run in the future.

Mike went to work under Al – calling the move the “saving grace of his career” and the “best move he’d ever made in his life.” While he only worked with Al for two years, Mike said these years were among his most valuable. Following Al, Mike worked under Eric Parthemore, with whom he’d attended college.

After five years with the U.S. Commission Company Mike received that interview call from Larry Hammond at the Auglaize Farmers Co-op. Though rumor had it the company was going under and likely to be bought out, Larry, a great salesman, convinced Mike to come on board. After 24 years with what would become a Sunrise Cooperative facility, Mike finally retired on his birthday in 2017 – “the most successful thing he’s done in his life.”

A familiar face at OABA Golf for Scholarships outings, Mike was an invaluable member of the Golf committee for many years, participation which was encouraged by Al Holdren, Eric Parthemore and Larry Hammond. Mike also managed the GEAPS golf outing for many years. In managing these events, Mike always appreciated the support of the event sponsors, who provided the means to make the events grow.

In retirement, one of Mike’s favorite activities is golfing, and he continues to golf at the OABA events with his tried and true team – the friends he’s made through his many years in the agriculture industry. Now we at the Ohio AgriBusiness Association are pleased to recognize Mike Stricker as the 2020 OABA Education Trust Honoree.

## For more than 50 years, the *Golf for Scholarships* outings

have been one of the primary fundraising activities for the Ohio AgriBusiness Association Educational Trust scholarship program, through which more than \$45,000 in scholarships is provided annually to students enrolled in an agriculture-related field attending The Ohio State University and OSU Agricultural Technical Institute, Central State University, Clark State Community College and Wilmington College.