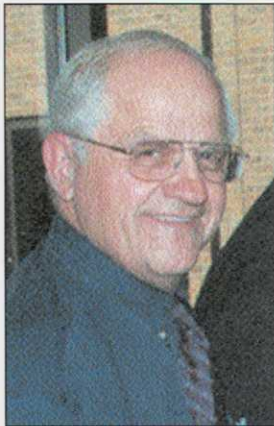


RCTC Horticulture Instructor Vern Bushlack is Retiring

By ROBIN FRUTH-DUSTAD
RCTC Horticulture Program Leader

After 44 years teaching and inspiring thousands of students on the joys and challenges of working in the Horticulture



industry, Rochester Community Technical College Horticulture instructor Vern Bushlack is retiring. Vern grew up on a farm near Wells, Minn. He attended the University of Minnesota

from 1959 to 1963. Vern was better known as "Bruno" on campus. He completed a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Education.

Vern started his teaching career at Kasson-Mantorville in 1963. Kasson-Mantorville had a traditional vocational agriculture program. Vern was probably one of the first high school agriculture teachers to develop curriculum for a horticulture class. He continued to teach at Kasson-Mantorville and develop the agriculture program until 1971.

In 1971, Vern accepted a teaching posi-

tion at John Marshall in Rochester, Minn. Once again he took a traditional vocational agriculture program and 'urbanized' the program. He developed curriculum in horticulture and natural resource manage-

"Vern was probably one of the first high school agriculture teachers to develop curriculum for a horticulture class."

ment. In 1974 Vern was instrumental in securing funds to build a unique two-level greenhouse located on a slope. This greenhouse still stands today.

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Vern Bushlack—

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Vern started Country Green, a successful lawn and landscape business, in 1978. He continued to teach at John Marshall and operate Country Green until 1988. Vern states, "I came to a crossroads... teacher or business owner." In 1988 he accepted a position with the Farm Business Management office in Rochester, but the teacher in him was calling. After the University of Minnesota decided to close the Waseca campus Vern became an advocate for a horticulture program at the technical college in Rochester. He surveyed the horticulture industry and applied to the State Board of Technical Colleges and convinced the board that southeastern Minnesota needed a horticulture program. In 1991 a horticulture program was started in the old culinary arts kitchen at the technical college in Rochester. The program quickly outgrew the soup kitchen. The board guaranteed that if the program was successful, money for collegiate facilities would follow. Yah right! Vern spent nine years lobbying for a collegiate facility. Talk to some of the Rochester legislators from this time peri-

od, Vern became a ... I'll just say a squeaky wheel. Finally, in 2000, the legislature approved bonding for the new facility. In 2002 the RCTC Horticulture program moved into a state-of-the-art Horticulture Technology facility. The space included a 4,000 square foot greenhouse, two SMART classrooms/labs, a resource room, offices, attached garage, storage rooms, and an outdoor lab, which became Vern's next project. The SMART Garden, outdoor lab has a great start, thanks to Vern. I promise to do my best to continue to develop the space into a wonderful community garden.

Could there be any more accolades? But of course, 44 years of them! Vern completed a Masters of Education with a Horticulture Emphasis in the 1970's. He has been a member of MVAIA, now the Minnesota Association of Agriculture Educators, MAAE, for his entire career, serving on the Board of Directors for two years. He has an honorary state FFA degree and is a MN FFA Hall of Fame member. The RCTC Horticulture program was voted outstanding Post-secondary program by MAAE in 2003. We like to say that the program finished a close second at nationals. In 2004 Vern was voted outstanding teacher of the year by Region 8 MAAE. In 1994 the Committee on Urban

Environment recognized the program for its exceptional contributions to environmental and aesthetic enhancement within the City of Rochester. And I am positive that there are many more career achievements!

"Vern Bushlack has worked with colleagues and business and industry representatives to develop one of Minnesota's finest two-year college horticulture learning opportunities. The quality teaching and learning environment at RCTC provides students with the classroom instruction and hands-on experiences needed to meet the skilled workforce demands of employers," said RCTC President Don Supalla.

RCTC Student Life and the RCTC horticulture students are hosting a golf tournament and dinner honoring Vern Bushlack. The event will be held at the Rochester Golf and Country Club on Monday, April 30. Vern's legacy will continue with the creation of the Vern Bushlack Endowed Scholarship for Horticulture students at RCTC.

(Editor's Note: For more information on how you can participate and celebrate, contact Robin Fruth-Dugstad, Horticulture Program Leader, at 507-529-6112 or email robin.fruth-dugstad@roch.edu.)

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