



California chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger entertained FPFC luncheon attendees with their demonstration of California avocado recipes.

CAC & FPFC: 50 Years of Collaboration

By Tim Linden

Early in 1965 a group of Southern California produce industry professionals met on the campus of Cal Poly Pomona to discuss their industry and how to get consumers to eat more fruits and vegetables. Harland Heath, a retailer at the time and currently a lifetime member of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council (FPFC), as well as the group's historian, remembers the day well. "People call me the 'father of the Fresh Produce Council', but it was Ralph Pinkerton." Heath remembers that during an open discussion period, Pinkerton, of the California Avocado Advisory Board, which became the California Avocado Commission (CAC) in 1978, brought up the idea of a local association. "Ralph said there was a Southern California grocery council and a Southern California deli council but nothing specifically for fresh produce." Pinkerton thought there should be a Fresh Produce Council of Southern California to promote the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Within a few months, the council was launched.

A lot has changed over the past 50 years, but the FPFC and CAC have worked closely together ever since that fateful day in the spring of 1965. This year, the California Avocado Commission will help the Fresh Produce & Floral Council celebrate its Golden Anniversary and take part in each celebratory event. As we honor the FPFC's half century, we look back at the collaborative partnership between FPFC and CAC.

Since its inception, the California avocado industry and

CAC have provided many board members and officers to the Southern California-based organization. Pinkerton served as a founding member of the council, was on its first board and served as chairman of the board in 1972. Members of Giumarra, Henry Avocado, Mission, West Pak, Del Rey, Calavo and Shanley Farms, to name a few, have all been involved in the FPFC over the years, attending events and serving on committees and the board.

In prior years, former CAC staff members Avi Crane, Rob-



At one FPFC luncheon meeting, Ralph Pinkerton (second from the right) brought avocado industry spokesperson and celebrity Angie Dickinson to mingle with the crowd. She was a huge hit.

ert Verloop and Dave Howald were frequent contributors to the FPFC. CAC retail marketing director Connie Stukenberg currently serves as FPFC secretary/treasurer. She is slated to be chairman of the board two years down the road.

And then there is Jan DeLyser, whose career is synonymous with both organizations. She joined the FPFC as public relations director in 1979. Two years later she was named executive vice president and served as head of staff for the next 12 years.

DeLyser is credited with greatly enhancing the reputation and visibility of the organization. Her first task upon being hired was to boost the respectability and profitability of the FPFC's magazine. She did both.

But DeLyser did much more over the years. While leading the FPFC, she helped develop the current committee structure that increased industry participation; launched the Expo format; created the Floral Expo; increased industry involvement in the Produce Marketing Association, the United Fresh Produce Association and the Produce for Better Health 5-A-Day effort; involved the FPFC more actively in the City of Hope; and served as the spokesperson for the Southern California produce industry in countless media interviews and consumer presentations.

Throughout the history of the FPFC, CAC has been a frequent sponsor of FPFC events. After leaving the Council, Jan remained active in the FPFC and when she joined the CAC staff became the Commission's spokesperson and representative at FPFC events.

Since joining CAC, DeLyser has served on the FPFC board, on numerous committees and as chairman of the board in 1999. She was also a member of the selection commit-

tee responsible for hiring the last two executives that have steered FPFC's progress over the past 20 years.

The FPFC has served as an excellent resource for CAC staff to network with retailers and colleagues in the industry. DeLyser, CAC's vice president of marketing, notes, "As the first regional trade association in the produce industry, the FPFC provides a unique opportunity to network with retailers and foodservice operators at events and work alongside CAC's customers in the two top markets for our fruit."

In fact, CAC's presence at FPFC events is a bit legendary. At one luncheon, CAC sponsored the University of Southern California marching band. At another, actress and avocado spokesperson Angie Dickinson was a surprise and celebrated guest. A couple of years ago renowned California chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger demonstrated California avocado recipes at an FPFC luncheon and kept the crowd highly entertained.

And no one will ever forget the time DeLyser, an athlete in her own right, impressed the crowd by throwing perfect spirals of small California avocado branded footballs throughout the room. The idea was such a hit that it has been imitated many times over the years — but never duplicated.

Current FPFC President Carissa Mace said the council is very appreciative of the avocado industry's involvement in the association. "CAC and FPFC obviously have an extremely long and rich history together," she said. "The collaboration between the two organizations has been mutually beneficial. The Commission truly understands the value of being actively involved in the council and we look forward to a continuation of our long-standing relationship." 🥑



Last year's CAC-sponsored FPFC luncheon featured the "Eat Brighter!" program and the launch of the California avocado snacking campaign. Here Gelson's Mark Carroll and CAC's Connie Stukenberg pose with Big Bird at the event.