

Cowlitz County

Vern Johnson

Vern Johnson's first piece of land was a 40-acre parcel consisting of second growth and pastureland in the Abernathy Creek area. His father gave it to him when he married his first wife Marjorie Travis in 1947. Ten years later he bought a 20-acre parcel. Vern describes how he came about his property, "From there it mushroomed. The 20 acres were landlocked. So, I gained right-of-way to it by buying 80 acres more. I bought 80 acres up in King County out of Enumclaw that we just sold. It was cut over when we bought it, but was replanted. We held it for probably 15 years and sold it as timberland. It'll be developed, I'm sure. Enumclaw is a bedroom community for Seattle."

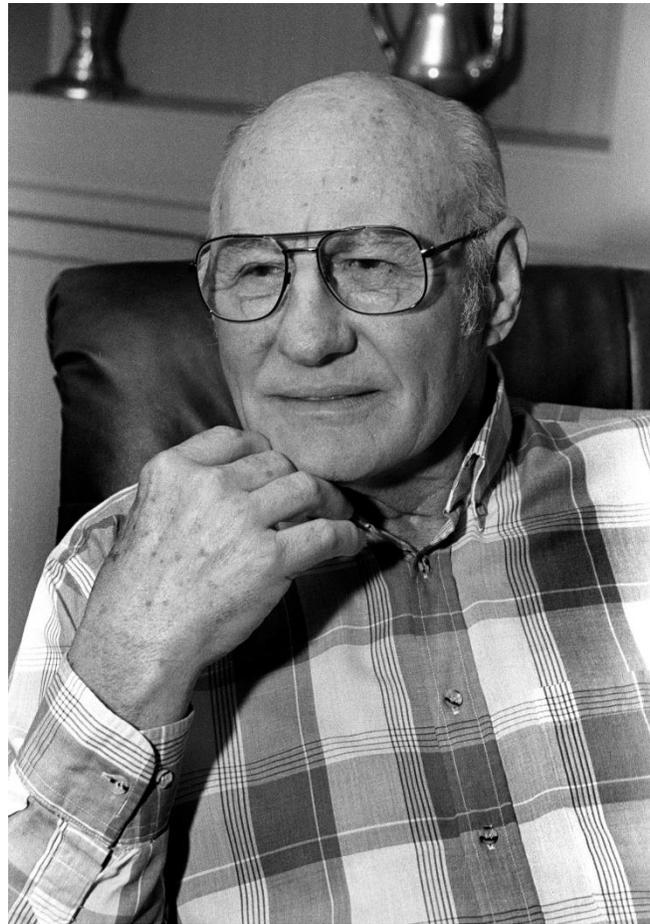
Born in Red Star, Arkansas, Vern comes from a legacy of loggers. "I've been around timber all of my life. My Dad and my Grandfather were both involved in timber," says Vern.

In 1935 at the age of six, Vern's family moved west where his father Willis Johnson started working for Longbell Lumber Company in Longview, Washington. Later, Vern started logging on his own. After graduating from R.A. Long High School in 1948, he started logging with his dad and brother. They soon purchased a tie and stud mill, which they operated until 1960.

In 1952 they took a five-year contract on a 2,300-acre ranch near Bridgeville in northern California. At the end of the contract Vern returned to Longview to work for Weyerhaeuser Pulp and Paper. When work slowed down a year later, he returned to California. He did some logging on 160 acres of mixed redwoods and Douglas fir that the Johnsons had bought on Fickle Hill. They did a select cut and 10 years later sold it to Simpson Timber Company. Vern returned to Longview in 1960 to work the next 30 years as an industrial painter in maintenance for Weyerhaeuser.

His involvement with the Cowlitz County Chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry Association began in the mid-seventies after attending a state meeting in Kelso. Over the past 25 years Vern has served as chapter president twice and has remained involved by attending state meetings and helping with local programs.

Vern reflects on a chapter effort, "After the eruption of Mt. St. Helens, our conservation group needed a lot of cottonwood starts. A group of us got together and did several thousand cuts for the conservation district. We spent several weekends doing it and made a little money for our chapter. The timber came from Weyerhaeuser's experimental cottonwood forest. They had to be 12 to 14 inches long and about as big around as your finger. It could be the top of a limb or the



top of a tree and they were used to stabilize the banks of the Toutle River, where the eruption had wiped it out.”

The running joke for Vern has been how well he grows vine maples. Vern, “At one of our annual meetings a farm forester said, just kind of joking, that I had the best vine maple stand he had ever seen.” Later, at a retirement party, he received a “Vine Maple” award.

About regulations, Vern states, “I would say regulations will probably kill you; that’s about the size of it. If you went out and bought timberland from scratch, I think it would be a rough go. As long as you keep it in the family, it makes it more profitable.” Vern plans on doing just that by skipping a generation and leaving his land to his grandchildren. He hopes that his example will inspire their interest in caring for the land long after he is gone.

“Vern’s the juice that keeps the chapter going, he always works hard at various projects. He is always the first one there, and been a real help in many respects.” – Chan Noerenberg

JOHNSON TREE FARM

Vernon Johnson, December 25, 1929

JoJo Johnson, born May 5, 1933

President Cowlitz County, 1982 and 1992