



Clark County

Ed & Barbara Nitkowski

“My 50 years on the Pacific Basin were spent trying to grow trees – and I failed. The next option was to try land.” With his signature humor, Ed Nitkowski describes how he became involved in tree farming while serving as a Merchant Marine. He had joined the Merchant Marines prior to WWII in 1940 and retired after 50 years in 1990. A bushy-browed, Pennsylvania native, Ed found himself spending more and more time on the west coast. In 1961, he made the decision to purchase 80 acres in Battle Ground, Washington.

As Ed tells it, he met his wife Barbara at the graveyard. Barbara clarifies that she was working the graveyard shift as an operator for an answering service while Ed worked with Stockton Stevedore for the Port of Stockton. They married in November 1966. Three years later, Ed, Barbara and their four young children from two previous marriages moved to Washington State to live on the 80 acres. In the beginning, they lived in a trailer while they built the house they live in today.

The Nitkowski’s introduction to the Clark County Farm Forestry involved a tree sale at a shopping market parking lot in the spring of 1970. Ed reflects on that day, “There was a small booth with three people selling seedlings. A gentleman came up and asked if he could help us, I said, ‘Yes. I am interested in growing trees below 500 feet.’ He said, ‘Just a minute,’ then waltzed over to a gentleman who just happened to be Fred Pickering. That’s how we got involved planting seedlings.” Barbara adds, “We were also going along nearby county right-of-ways and in ditches to pull up sprouts that were coming up and replanting them at the farm. That’s how we got a lot of our trees here in the picnic area.”

The two found a passion in growing trees, which has resulted in planting over 30 different species on their property. Along their driveway are 15 different species. Ed, “We like the variety of trees. We have sequoia, Doug fir, two types of cedar, four or five types of pine, all mixed, in our plantation. Hemlock thrives here.”

Their 80 acres originally consisted of alder, deciduous trees and pasture for hay. Then one year a burn in the hay field went out of control. Ed sent Barbara dashing back to the house to call the fire department, who then called the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The fire crew dispelled the fire under the supervision of Irv Beard, which fostered a friendship between the Nitkowskis and Irv. Over the next week, Irv came back daily to check on the fire.

One day, a brisk wind sparked some coals on a root, threatening to start another blaze. The fire crew was brought back on site to assess the situation. It was then that Irv suggested to Ed and Barbara they plant timber, which they did. They clear-cut their first 15 acres of alder and replanted 11,000 various conifers. Over the years, Ed and Barbara believe they have planted more than 20,000 seedlings and don't plan on stopping now.

With Irv's encouragement, they got involved with Clark County Farm Forestry in 1985. The association's annual picnics were held on their property until it was decided that the Tree Farmers of the Year Committee should host. Barbara was recently awarded for her participation with the Clark County Farm Forestry Association (CCFFA) for her various roles as secretary, treasurer, and membership chair over the past 20 years.

Both Ed and Barbara look forward to the camaraderie of the Clark County tree sales, biannual potlucks, and twilight tours. Since becoming members, they have assisted with every event in one-way or another. They were awarded Clark County Tree Farmer of the Year in 1995.

By planting trees, Ed has found land after all his years at sea.

"We just wanted to have a variety of conifers, which is what we've done. And I'm very happy with the situation." – Ed Nitkowski

NITKOWSKI LIVING TRUST TREE FARM

Edward Walter Nitkowski, born April 4, 1921

Barbara Beryl Bradley Nitkowski, born June 28, 1938

Clark County Farm Forestry Secretary and Treasurer

Clark County Farm Forestry Association Tree Farmer of the Year, 1995