

Clark County

Fred Pickering



“It was a night to remember with big trees being pulled out of the ground from the fire storm,” Fred Pickering reflects on the Raft River Fire on the Olympic Peninsula in the late 1960s. “When we finally decided it was time to get away from this thing, rocks the size of hens eggs were coming off the gravel road, sucked up like a big vacuum cleaner into the fire. Slash, fire tool boxes, five gallon buckets, things were just leaving. It became obvious that we could maybe become part of those things being sucked into the firestorm and we decided it was time to get farther away.

Fred is a 36-year veteran, DNR (Department of Natural Resources) fire fighter and farm forester with dozens of stories to tell about fighting fires, including the Mount St. Helens eruption, “The summer after the eruption (of Mount St. Helens), my job was to take five or six people in a helicopter and decide which fires were a threat and which ones needed to be put out. One day in July, the mountain was having little eruptions and decided to erupt while we were up there on the hillside. We got the word that the mountain was erupting. The helicopter came back to get us and I was ushering everybody into the helicopter.

“I was the last man in the helicopter, about seven or eight feet off the ground. I jumped up, grabbed on to the skid and hopped into the helicopter. We were off on the east side and it was spitting rocks.”

But danger is not all that he met on the job. Linda Pickering recalls their courtship, “I was a lookout on a lookout tower and Fred was a fire warden. I got something in my eye and they sent him up to take me to the doctor. Ten days later we were engaged.”

Fresh out of Anacortes High School, Linda describes her job in Forks, Washington, “I was in a 90-foot steel tower that was left over from WWII and I had a little seven-foot observation cabin that I stayed in during the day. At night I would go down to a sleeping cabin. My duties were to watch for fires. The first one I reported was a steam train going through the valley, saw the smoke here and then it changed over there. I was very embarrassed. There were five of us girls, and we were all trying to beat everyone else on pointing out a fire. “

Although Linda liked the outdoors, she had no experience in forestry. On the flip side, Fred grew up in a family of loggers. “As a little kid I liked machinery, dirt and pitch. So I followed around my heroes.”

In 1957 while still in high school, Fred landed a job with the DNR on the fire crew, a job that kept evolving until retirement in 1993. Fred, “My forestry training was on-the-job training with the DNR. After several years they finally blessed me as being one of them.”

Fred and Linda moved to Clark County in 1967 when Fred was sent by the DNR to promote forestry. The Clark County Farm Forestry’s membership was about 40 people at the time. Since then, Fred has been in numerous farm forestry activities including legislative proceedings. Fred

is passionate about tree farming and property rights, but frustrated with the current system regulating tree farmers.

Despite the frustration over regulations, Fred and Linda do not plan on selling their land or quitting tree farming. However, when the 1999 Forest Practices regulations were passed, they felt pressured into cutting 60-year old timber that otherwise would have been left for possibly another generation. Fred is a wealth of information, and knows the issues over land-use taxation, zoning restrictions and penalties, inheritance taxes and the Right to Tree Farm Bill; a bill initiated by Fred but was rejected in the senate.

Fred contributes to the community by sharing his experience in the woods and expertise in forest management policy with fellow tree farmers, school children and anyone with an interest.

Over the years, Fred and Linda have planted 50,000 trees or more on their properties. When adding up the arranged plantings on state or private lands, the numbers go into the millions. Linda participates with the tree planting, bud capping, fertilizing and pruning.

Inspired by a lookout tower, their house has a panoramic view from the living room and kitchen. It has the feel of a tree house, complete with carved wooden fixtures and a curved wood banister.

BEAR RIVER TREE FARM LLC
Fred Pickering, born December 3, 1939
Linda Pickering, born May 12, 1946
Member Clark County Farm Forestry
President Clark County Farm Forestry
Association, 1993-1994
CCFFA Tree Farmer of the year, 1978-1979

