

Jensen honored for lifetime of work in cherry industry

By **LORI HALL STEELE**
Special to the Record-Eagle

This summer marks Jim Jensen's 41st cherry crop, and in those years he's done everything from processing fruit to heading up one of the nation's leading manufacturers of maraschininos.

Jensen was named by the National Cherry Festival as Industry Man of the Year for his current leadership as head of CherrCo, a federated cooperative that works with cherry processors in Michigan, New York, Wisconsin, Utah, Washington and Ontario.

"I feel very honored," said Jensen, 55, of Ludington. "This is an industry I've spent all my life in, and it's very much an honor to be recognized by my peers."

Following the financially disastrous 1995 cherry crop, Jensen organized CherrCo, traveling in spring 1997 to cherry-growing regions in the United States and Canada. By July 1997, he had agreement of grower cooperatives representing 75 percent of the nation's tart cherries to launch CherrCo.

"It was obvious as I watched this industry over the years that we needed to do something to stabilize the prices," Jensen said. "We needed to bring dollars into the industry to help growers survive."

Some years, cherries were abundant and prices dropped. Other years, poor crops led to undersupply, which can hamper efforts to find new markets and uses for cherries.

Today, 29 cooperatives are working together under CherrCo. In conjunction with

a federal marketing order that governs supply, the amount of cherries headed to market are more controlled and prices have stabilized.

"We market in common so we have established a price for the products we're marketing," Jensen said. "In the long run, we believe that price stabilization along with supply stabilization will help us to grow the market."

Earl Peterson, president of the Shelby-based Peterson Farms, nominated Jensen for the Cherry Festival's Industry Man of the Year award, saying, "No single individual has had the impact that Jim has had in building industry cooperation and industry financial strength."

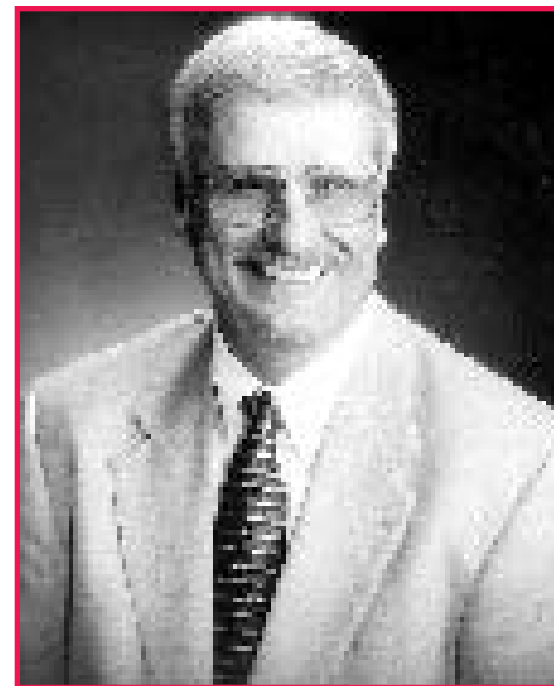
Thomas Rochford, president and general manager of Cherry Growers Inc., in Grawn, also nominated

Jim Jensen of Ludington is this year's Cherry Festival Industry Person of the Year.

Jensen, citing his tireless efforts to achieve better returns for the cherry industry.

"Under his leadership at CherrCo, returns on tart cherries have stabilized and have brought some optimism to the grower community about the future of the cherry industry," Rochford wrote.

Nominees for the Cherry



Festival's Industry Person of the Year often come from the Michigan Cherry Committee, the governing body of the Cherry Marketing Institute. Jensen, however, was nominated independently by several industry players.

A five-member Cherry Festival committee selects a recipient based on the individual's or couple's overall contribution to the cherry industry as well as how much support they have within the industry, said Judy LaCross, director of cherry promotion for National Cherry Festival and a cherry grower in the Cedar area.

"We consider a variety of things, but most important is leadership, that they've demonstrated they are a leader, whether they're a grower or a processor or an industry leader," LaCross said.

The festival has named an Industry Person of the Year since the early 1980s and in the mid-1990s began including couples in the designation. Past recipients range from Michigan State University researchers to couples who operate cherry farms. Three couples and cherry industry leaders from Utah, Wisconsin and New York have been among honorees.

"A lot of times we try to choose someone at a juncture in their life, maybe close to retirement or they've done something really outstanding for the industry," LaCross said. "Whatever their contribution is, it's very significant. Show the list of recipients over the years to anyone involved in cherries, and they'll recognize the names."

The National Cherry Festival rolls out the red carpet for recipients and "treats them royally all week," LaCross said. They receive red blazers, ride in the Heritage and Cherry Royale parades, receive accommodations and are recognized at a cherry industry program.

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