West inducted into Poultry Hall of Fame

By Karen Templeton MSU Ag Communications

Laurel

STARKVILLE — Fifty-one years after graduating from Mississippi State University, Coyt “Bud” West returned to his alma mater to be honored by the industry he served.

On Nov. 17, West’s colleagues, friends, family, and MSU faculty and administration gathered at the university’s poultry science building to honor West as he was inducted into the Mississippi Poultry Association’s Hall of Fame for his many years of service to the poultry industry.

West majored in agricultural education and took on a few different jobs after graduation before deciding to manage his family soybean farm in Jones County.

“I was happy to be farming on my family’s land,” West said. “Then Hurricane Camille hit and put us out of business.”

Determined to make a career for himself, West joined Sanderson Farms in 1969 as a pullet handling supervisor. It wasn’t long before West was promoted to various jobs such as company farms supervisor and then broiler manager in Hazlehurst. After several years of management of Hazlehurst, West transferred back to Laurel where he was promoted to Laurel production division manager.

Bob Billingsley, Sanderson Farms director of development and engineering, has worked with West since 1984 and said no one was surprised when CEO Joe Sanderson Jr. asked West to spearhead a new complex in McComb.

“At the time, Joe had 1,500 employees to choose from, and he knew quickly that Bud was his man,” said Billingsley, who spoke at the induction ceremony. “West was entrusted with going into the community, building relationships and getting the new Sanderson Farms complex built. This was the first time someone had done this, and he did not let the company or the community down.”

After his success in McComb, Sanderson asked West to manage the building of a new complex in Bryan-College Station, Texas.
“This was quite the venture for the company and there was no doubt that West could handle it,” Billingsley said. “He and his wife, Gwen, made an outstanding team. During his time in the communities, Gwen was business manager and recruited contract producers in the office.”

West eventually returned to the business headquarters in Laurel as director of production. In 2004, West was asked to take on the development of a third new production complex in south Georgia. He retired at the end of 2004 and now enjoys spending time with his wife, daughters and grandchildren.

“Our company is so fortunate to have had West for so many years. He would do anything for us,” Billingsley said. “He helped make Sanderson Farms a part of communities by being consistent, fair and approachable. He did everything in the right way and in the right spirit.”

Mississippi Poultry Association president Mark Leggett said West was an obvious choice for the Poultry Hall of Fame.

“Bud was a recruiter, trainer and mentor. He got people involved in an industry that provides so much for our state,” Leggett said. “He truly deserves this recognition.”

Since 1973, a committee put together by MPA selects an individual to be honored for his or her work in one of Mississippi’s most profitable industries. The honorees’ portraits are displayed in MSU’s poultry science building.

“Mississippi State is the most fitting place to bestow this honor as it is the institution that prepares so many for this dynamic industry,” Leggett said. “We are proud to partner with the university.”

West, who was joined at the induction ceremony by his wife, Gwen, and his children, grandchildren and sisters, took time to reflect on his career.

“One has to enjoy what they do to be happy,” he said. “I have loved the poultry industry and the people I worked with and for.”

Of the recognition, West said he was honored to become a member of such an elite group. Being at MSU, surrounded by those he respects and cares for was what made the event special for West.

“You are only as good as the people around you,” he said. “This is really as good as it gets.”