



Harold Eugene Burkhart

February 29, 1944 - October 20, 2022

Harold Eugene Burkhart, age 78, was suddenly taken from us on October 20, 2022. Harold was born at home on February 29, 1944, in Hunnewell, Kansas to Zelma Lutz and Walter Frank Burkhart. Harold had two siblings, Elaine, his younger sister, and Ernest, who is two years his senior. Harold learned a love for the land and the environment growing up on the family farm at the Kansas-Oklahoma border. He enjoyed hunting and was particularly fond of his hunting dogs. Harold excelled in school and appreciated music, playing the trombone in the school band. He also played football and ran track at South Haven High School.

Building on his agricultural upbringing, Harold attended Oklahoma State University, where he earned a degree in forestry in 1965. He was a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the Farm House Fraternity at Oklahoma State. After earning his bachelor's degree, Harold went on to obtain his master's and doctoral degrees in forest biometrics from the University of Georgia in 1969. He then began his long tenured career, which spanned over 50 years, at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia.

On June 12, 1971, Harold was married to Katherine (Kathy) West at the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church. Harold was raised in the Methodist faith and joined the Presbyterian church after his marriage to Kathy. He was an active

member of the congregation until his death and served in various capacities such as Sunday school teacher and church elder. In 1981, Harold and Kathy welcomed the long-awaited birth of their son, Qato.

Harold was a University Distinguished Professor, a title earned by only one percent of Virginia Tech's faculty based on national and international recognition. He was a dedicated researcher, teacher and mentor in Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources and Environment, where his meritorious contributions shaped forest modeling from the late 20th century to the current day. Harold served as a committee member for more than 150 graduate students in programs across the university, including 60 master's and doctoral candidates who completed degrees under his direction.

During Harold's distinguished career, he served as Forestry department head from 1995 to 2008. He published more than 300 research papers, research bulletins, book chapters, and proceedings papers. He authored two widely adopted books: the undergraduate textbook *Forest Measurements*, now in its sixth edition, and the advanced-level book *Modeling Forest Trees and Stands*, considered the leading reference for that research specialty. Among the numerous awards recognizing Harold's exceptional professional contributions, he was selected as Virginia's Outstanding Scientist in 2013.

Harold and his family enjoyed extensive international travel, including a sabbatical year in New Zealand, where he served as a senior research fellow at the Forest Research Institute in Rotorua. Other family and professional travel spanned six continents and included places such as China, India, South Africa, Brazil, Chile, Portugal, Spain, and Scandinavia, to name a few.

Harold was a kind and generous person to all. He and Kathy invited his students into their home to celebrate Thanksgiving dinner and other occasions year after year, giving his students a sense of family and fellowship. His

mentorship enriched the careers of dozens of students and colleagues.

He was generous with his time towards family, regularly visiting with his son, siblings, nieces, nephews and cousins. A pillar of stability and wisdom, Harold imparted his advice when called upon for guidance. He included family and friends on vacations to experience different geographical, societal and cultural settings. An engaging conversationalist, he was curious about the vastness of the world and always eager to share his wonderment and insight with others.

Harold was preceded in death by his wife, Katherine West (Kathy) Burkhart, his parents, Zelma and Walter Burkhart, and his sister, Elaine Martin. He is survived by his son Qato Burkhart of Los Angeles, CA, his brother Ernest Burkhart of Braman, OK, his brother-in-law James L.W. West III of Beaufort, SC, and numerous, nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews.

A memorial service will be held at 10:30 am on Saturday, March 18, 2023 at Blacksburg Presbyterian Church. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to the Harold Burkhart Fellowship for forestry graduate students, which will carry on Harold's legacy as an educator. To contribute, please contact Andrew Ickes, assistant dean of advancement, at aickes@vt.edu or 304-667-4443.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

MAR 18. 10:30 AM (ET)

Blacksburg Presbyterian Church
701 Church Street SE
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

DA

“ It is a blessing to have Prof. H.E. Burkhart in my educational Journey at VT where I joined after travelling several miles from Uganda to pursue the Doctorate in Forestry. May Harold's soul RIP. Daniel Waiswa, Makerere University, Uganda.

Daniel - March 22, 2023 at 02:56 AM

LD

“ Harold was a scholar's scholar, and it was an honor to work with him my nearly 30 years at Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources. Most importantly, he was the most honest, kind-hearted person I ever worked with and I had the deepest respect for him. What a role model he was for everyone. The highlight of my projects with him was when he brought over a Syrian couple who worked at the University of Aleppo when civil war came to Syria. He took care of them and the family. We both worked hard to help their colleague to get out of Syria but the window of opportunity had closed and with great disappointment we were not successful. Lynn Davis, retired Communications Director, College of Natural Resources

Lynn Davis - March 07, 2023 at 11:20 PM