



Farming and agriculture are and have always been a part of our community. In six short decades, our corner of Ontario has been both the Tomato Capital of Canada, and the Greenhouse Epicenter of North America. Perhaps no one's story exemplifies this as much as that of 'Papa' Vern Toews.

Born in 1937, in Harrow, his parents moved the family to Point Pelee National Park where he was raised. At the time, there was a one-hundred-acre apple orchard in the park, which his father managed. Later, the family moved and started a farm on Concession 1. After graduating from U.M.E.I High School, Vern attended the University of Guelph and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture. Upon graduation, he spent several years in British Columbia working as the Director of Agriculture Research with Del Monte Foods.

Family and community called Vern back to Leamington, where he got back to his farming roots for many years with his father. They established a greenhouse farm and worked several hundred acres of processing tomatoes.

As greenhouse farming was evolving in the sixties, it faced several challenges...low prices for produce, labour shortages, and an outdated tariff structure that was not conducive to a modern prosperous agriculture sector.

At the time, Vern was then Chairman of the Essex

Country Associated Growers, and he embarked on an Ontario-wide tour to promote and organize the Greenhouse Growers, creating the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Marketing Board. Today that organization has evolved to be the OGVG (Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Association). In 1967, this new board could set prices that were paid by the various licensed shippers to the farmers. Vern was elected to chair this new organization and the pricing authority stayed in effect for nearly twenty years.

Vern was also part of a team right here in Leamington that after many meetings with both Federal and Provincial officials developed the International Guest Worker Program. This program has proven to be a game-changer; not only for the growing greenhouse sector in our region but also for fruit, field vegetables, poultry, livestock farmers, and more across Canada.

Vern led negotiations on behalf of the Greenhouse Growers of Canada before the Tariff Board in Ottawa, to update the old Tariff structure for Greenhouse Growers. The intent was to expand our markets into the United States while also seeking protection from cheaper greenhouse produce coming into Canada.

Vern retired in 2012 and has since been an active member of The Gleaners as a corporate fund-raiser, past chairman, and now, third term board member.

Last year, he spearheaded the Leamington Food Hub in partnerships with the Unemployment Help Centre-Hub of Opportunities, rescuing produce from local farmers and creating a new model of how to connect fresh food with 15 Food Banks in Windsor-Essex, as well as partners in Toronto, Mississauga, Burlington, London, St. Thomas, and indigenous communities in both Northern Saskatchewan and Ontario. Since June of this year, the Food Hub has distributed two million pounds of produce to the above partners, translating to roughly 5 million servings so far.

At 85 years young, Papa Vern shows no signs of stopping. Feeding people in our community and beyond has been a passion and in many ways, his story has shaped the story of greenhouse farming for our growers today.



The members of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Producers' Marketing Board of District One are as follows, left to right: Mr. John Peterson, Ruthven; Mr. Keith Malott, Secretary, Kingsville; Mr. Vern Toews, Chairman, Ruthven; Mr. James Lapos, Leamington; Mr. Bill McDonald, Kingsville; Mr. Pete Dick, Leamington.

THE ADVENTURES OF Lady Bug

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers work to bring fresh and nutritious vegetables to families near and far.

British Columbia also has a high concentration of greenhouses. In the last weeks, our farm friends and fellow Canadians in BC have been dealing with devastating floods and mudslides.

We support our friends in their recovery over the next weeks and months. If you would like to offer aid, there are several charities and organizations on the ground that you may wish to support in this time of need.

Charity Spotlight:



The OGVG offers sincere congratulations to Hogs for Hospice's recent award received from the Association of Fundraising Professionals - Canada South Chapter for **Outstanding Fundraising Champion** award in celebration of National Philanthropy Day, which took place Nov 18th.

This award honours an individual or group who exemplifies an outstanding commitment to engage, support, and collaborate with charitable organizations and individuals in the community.

Christine Colautti had the pleasure of nominating Hogs for Hospice on be-

half of Erie Shores Health Foundation. A huge factor in securing this award was the ability of the Hog's team to adapt during Covid and still raise funds in support of Erie Shores Hospice. This was vital to maintain operations at ES Hospice, as Hogs helps to fund 30 - 50% of the operational budget each year. In total, Hogs has raised \$1.4M for our local Hospice and counting!!!

Starting today, you can help continue to support Hogs for Hospice mission with a purchase of their 50/50 Holiday draw. OGVG is proud to continue to support this incredible organization and the work they do in our community.



OGVG Spotlight



Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG) works hard to promote and connect its 220 growers with allied stakeholders, government agencies, and value-chain partners across North America through various events, initiatives, and community activities. OGVG supports the Ontario greenhouse vegetable sector and its growers in many capacities to ensure success for today, sustainability for tomorrow, and fresh, nutritious, quality produce for all!

OGVG is a not-for-profit, member-based organization with a dynamic team located right in Leamington. OGVG staff offers many services to members including research, marketing, trade access, labour support, and assistance for anything grower-related. The staff at OGVG work with members to ensure they adhere to food safety programs, adapt to market changes, and implement new technologies and processes to keep our growers be competitive on the world stage. The science team works continuously with researchers on projects to maintain growers' position as leaders in greenhouse innovation. The marketing team works to educate consumers, retailers, and distributors across North America of the year-round availability and high quality of greenhouse produce grown in Leamington and how to incorporate tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers into family meals that are both nutritious and full of flavor.