

Wheat Leaders Reunion Held

As Del Wiedemann toured the Kansas Wheat Innovation Center in Manhattan with his wife, Pat, his enthusiasm could scarcely be contained. From the Center's molecular breeding laboratories, to row-after-row of environmental growth chambers, to the custom-built greenhouse complex, the Innovation Center symbolizes a new future for the nation's wheat industry.

"The word that comes to mind is what teenagers say, and that's 'awesome'," said Wiedeman, a Wakeeney farmer who served on the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers board of directors in the 1980s and was president of the National Association of Wheat Growers in 1990.

Wiedeman was one of nearly 30 past KAWG directors and Kansas Wheat Commissioners who visited the KWIC on Feb. 9. The goal of the first-ever "Wheat Leaders Reunion" was to re-engage those whose leadership shaped the current Kansas wheat industry with a building that, indirectly, they helped create.

"This has been an emotional experience," said Wiedeman of his first look at the KWIC, and the chance to reconnect with many farmers he hadn't seen for years. "With this facility, built by farmers for wheat farmers, it's kind of like coming home again."

Aaron Harries, director of marketing for Kansas Wheat, said the gathering was a unique opportunity for leaders from the two organizations to get reacquainted.

"These are the folks who laid the groundwork for this Innovation Center. While the two organizations have evolved over the years, strong leadership has been a constant. A vision of a home for the Kansas wheat farmer is something that these leaders have shared and it's nice to see their dreams realized," Harries said.

Cooperation between KAWG and the KWC has been vital to the strength of the Kansas wheat industry in the past. That the two groups led the building of the Kansas Wheat Innovation Center is impressive, said Ernie Schlatter, a Lebanon farmer who served on the Kansas Wheat Commission in the 2000s.

"I was amazed to think about what's going to take place here," he said. "To lead wheat research,



Back row, from left: Joe Berry, Joe Kejr, John Thaemert, Steve Clanton, Kent Eddy, Ernie Schlatter, Morris Krug, Del Wiedeman, Jerry McReynolds, Ray Crumbaker, Doug Keesling, Don Keesling, Adrian Polansky, Paul Penner. Front row, from left: Elsie Wolf, Geena Kejr, Shelly Thaemert, Sue Clanton, Barbara Krug, Pat Wiedeman, Melanie Eddy, Diane McReynolds, Linda Crumbaker, Kris Polansky, Deborah Penner.

what could be a better place than right here in Manhattan?"

The tour participants learned how doubled haploid wheat research being conducted at the KWIC will lead to quicker development of wheat varieties suited for Kansas farmers. This research, and future research projects in the Center's 25,000 square feet of laboratory and greenhouse space, has the potential to boost wheat yields and improve efficiency of wheat farmers.

"I would like to see wheat yields increase about 10 bushels per acre; I think that's the goal of all wheat farmers," Schlatter said.

By their investments in the wheat checkoff, and through decades of grassroots leadership in Topeka and Washington, D.C., Kansas wheat producers have paved the way for the next era in wheat research and innovation.

"The wheat industry will play an extremely important role in the future, as it has in the past. We need to do things in a modern way, and be able to position, adjust and innovate what's coming down the road," Wiedeman said. "This facility will help keep the U.S. wheat industry competitive for a long time."