



John (Jack) Nelson

November 25, 1934 - October 4, 2024

John F. (Jack) Nelson (89) passed away peacefully at home on October 4, 2024. Jack was born on November 25, 1934, in Deland, Florida to loving parents John and Evelyn Nelson. With the growth of the citrus industry, the Nelson family moved to Umatilla when Jack was 14. He was an outstanding student at Umatilla High School, graduating in 1952 as salutatorian of his class. Jack was an All-Conference football player, a participant in Boys State, and a leading member of numerous clubs.

After high school, Jack attended The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina. He ascended to the top of his class to become the Regimental Commander of the Class of 1956, the highest ranking cadet officer in charge of the Corps of Cadets. He led the Summerall Guards, a silent drill platoon of accomplished senior cadets of The Citadel who frequently performed their drill steps at various events and exhibitions.

Jack served for two years in the Army after his Citadel graduation while being stationed in Ft. Benning, Georgia. He then moved back to Umatilla to join Golden Gem Growers, a relatively young citrus cooperative based in Umatilla. Jack worked in various roles including Purchasing Agent, Administrative Assistant, and Executive Vice President before eventually rising to the role of President & General Manager. Under his leadership, Golden Gem grew to one of the largest citrus cooperatives in the State of Florida which at one time had

over 1,000 employees. With his positive demeanor, Jack directed Golden Gem through many turbulent times brought on by the devastating freezes of the 1980s while remaining optimistic about the citrus industry throughout. He eventually retired after a 40+ year career at Golden Gem.

Jack also served as President of the Florida Processors Association as well as the Juice Products Association. He was also on the boards of Golden Gem Growers and the Umatilla Citrus Growers Association along with a 35-year stint on the board of United Southern Bank. Locally, he was involved in the Jaycees in his younger days as well as serving a term on the Umatilla City Council. His unassuming yet engaged style was always well received by other board members along with his wit and humor that could lighten almost any moment.

A Saturday afternoon was not complete without a full slate of college football games on the TV. Jack also enjoyed tennis during his younger years as well as fishing in our local lakes and the bays and coastal areas of the Gulf Coast of Florida. Family gatherings were special to him, and he loved nothing more than a drive through a citrus grove in March with the windows down smelling the sweet orange blossoms.

Jack is survived by his wife, Sherry, children Jeff Nelson, Greg (Connie) Nelson, Cindy Nelson, and Chris Neal, grandchildren Jonathan and Adam Nelson, Eric and Galina Nelson, and Aubrey Neal Johnson and Taylor Neal, and eight great grandchildren. He is also survived by a very special niece in Julie (Bill) Spearman. He was pre-deceased by his parents John and Evelyn Nelson and sister Ann Hall.

A private family funeral will be held on Saturday, October 19 followed immediately by a Celebration of Life with refreshments from 12:30 to 2:30 at The First Presbyterian Church of Umatilla, 493 N. Kentucky Ave., Umatilla.

Tribute Wall



“ Sherry, I'm so sorry to hear about jack, he was one in a million,! never would have had the fun as the director of little gems without his sense of humor when things overwhelmed me at work. He was a loving caring man who always looked out for all of us.

Dale Hill - February 24, 2025 at 05:07 PM



“ Love, Lauren and John planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of John (Jack) Nelson.

Love, Lauren and John - October 18, 2024 at 09:43 AM



“ Love, Lauren and John purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of John (Jack) Nelson.



Love, Lauren and John - October 18, 2024 at 09:43 AM



“ Bill & Kim Lennon planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of John (Jack) Nelson.

Bill & Kim Lennon - October 16, 2024 at 09:21 PM

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“ *Bill & Kim Lennon purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of John (Jack) Nelson.*



Bill & Kim Lennon - October 16, 2024 at 09:21 PM