A Tribute to Gene Burgess – University of Tennessee’s Pesticide Safety Education Program Coordinator Until November 30, 2011

Karen M. Vail, Ph.D
Professor and Extension Urban Entomologist
Entomology and Plant Pathology
2431 Joe Johnson Drive
205 Ellington Plant Science Bldg.
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-4560
kvail@utk.edu
http://fireants.utk.edu
http://www.extension.org
http://schoolipm.utk.edu
http://eppserver.ag.utk.edu/personnel/Vail/vail.htm
(865)974-7138

Gene Burgess officially retired from his full-time position at the University of Tennessee in December 2009, but resumed work part-time in February 2010. (Interpretation: he went from an 80-hour work week to a 40-hour one.) In December of 2009 we held a retirement party for him. During the ceremony, those in attendance were given the opportunity to say a few words to Gene. Now this was a tricky situation. If I decided to roast Gene, I would still have to work with him and that might not work so well. As I pondered whether to roast or honor Gene, others were starting to speak. Before I knew it, the room was quiet. Others had already spoken and had said what I intended stay. I said a few words, but in no way did they convey my thanks, appreciation and honor to have worked with him. So I’d like to take this opportunity to more justly relay my sentiments as November 30, 2011 is Gene’s final retirement date from UT.

When I first arrived at the University of Tennessee in 1996, I was very green. I had just finished a job where I was a full-time USDA biological technician and part-time University of Florida student and was raising three-year old and 9-month old girls along with the help of my husband. This new position as an assistant professor and Extension specialist required much travel and hence I didn’t have much time for anything. Gene showed me the ropes. He invited me to teach the category 7 certification classes across the state. At this point, we were traveling to Jonesborough, Cleveland, Nashville, Jackson and Memphis about once a quarter. He introduced me to the county Extension agents in these areas and during our long trips in the car I learned what Extension was all about. Gene and the Pesticide Applicator Training Program (now the Pesticide Safety Education Program) provided many opportunities for me to help the pest management industry. He invited me to prepare certification and licensing manuals. My PhD research had pertained to the biology and management of a single ant, *Monomorium pharaonis*, and so my in-depth knowledge of other pests was more limited. By preparing these manuals I gained a better understanding of all the pests for which I provide management recommendations. I might not have given Gene the impression that I appreciated this opportunity. In fact, I may have given him the opposite impression.

The Extension folks in the Entomology & Plant Pathology Department are coming to realize that Gene won’t be with us every day after November 30th and we’re a little depressed. We won’t hear his calm voice reverberating through the halls. It was somewhat comforting to look down the hall at the end of the day and see Gene’s door still open with Gene still working after others had packed up for the day. Gene is a good friend who could always be counted on for honest advice and he was always there for us as he has been for you too. So if you have a chance, let Gene (gburgess@utk.edu, 865-974-7138) know how much you appreciated him and what he did for your industry. I want him to know what a great mentor he has been to me and that I hope when I retire I will have earned the respect from as many people as he has. Thanks for the opportunities Gene and relax and enjoy!