

Meet Your Columbia REA Board of Directors



Dennis Munden
Board Member, District 2
Retired
Burbank, Wa

“My whole career I’ve worked with young people. My challenge has been to make them aware of this world of agriculture.”

— Dennis Munden

It seems to have been destined from the start that Dennis Munden would end up on the Board of Directors for Columbia REA.

While growing up in the Dayton area, birthplace of Columbia REA, Dennis’ father, Ray Munden, was the CREA Accountant from the early 1950s until his passing in 1968. Ray’s twin brother, Rex, was a career lineman for Columbia REA as well. Ironically, it wasn’t until 1976, when Dennis and his wife, Lori moved into their self-proclaimed “Starter Home,” a lovely acre filled with wonderful family memories in Burbank Heights (where they still live...44 years later), that they became REA members.

But it was while still living in Dayton, that he developed an affinity for the cooperative spirit that would stay with him forever.

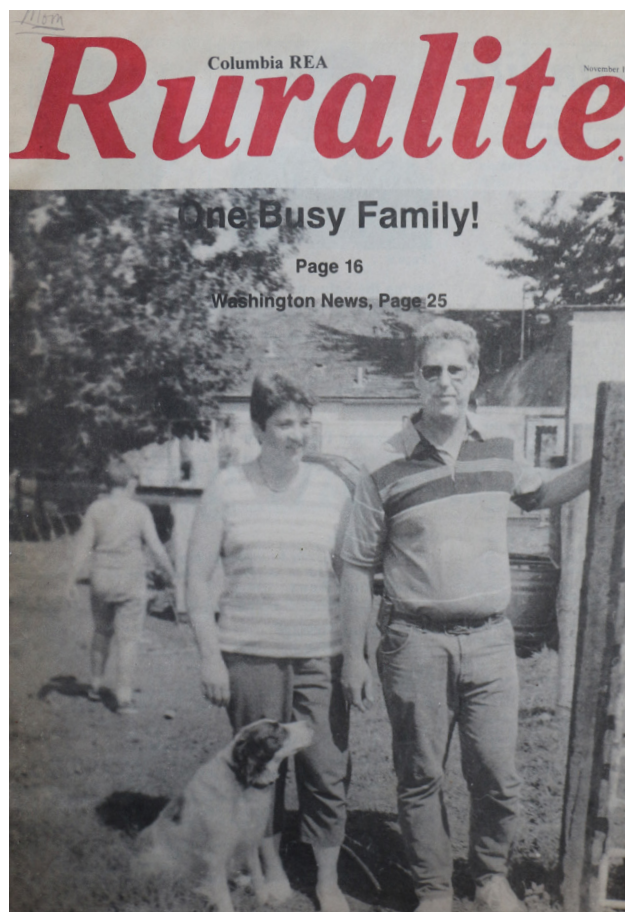
“After my Dad’s passing, the entire Columbia REA crew, in support of our family, came out and painted our house...all the line crew, all the office crew. As a service to our family, they literally carried our family through that difficult time following the loss of dad,”

recalls Dennis.

“It’s always been an honor to be part of a cooperative that truly lives to take care of its members and its employees.”

Serving others has also been part of Dennis’ personal life. As an Agricultural Sciences teacher with 41 years in the classroom, and several of those years following his multiple failed attempts at retirement, Dennis has shaped hundreds, if not thousands, of lives, and has been fortunate to see the positive influence he has had on his students many times over.

“Following my first retirement from teaching, I received a phone call from a former student who was developing and teaching the new Agriculture program at Pasco High School. She was



Dennis Munden’s first appearance in *Ruralite* was in November of 1991, in a feature about his family, including a few furry, four-legged friends.

One Busy Family!

by Carol Petersen

Home is where you hang your hats!" describes the active family of Dennis and Lori Munden, Columbia REA members in Irbank Heights, near Pasco. Community, church and school activities keep their calendars filled—from farm through the school year, and well into summer.

As Vocational Agriculture teacher at amakia High School in Kennewick, Dennis teaches approximately 150 students a day in a variety of agricultural activities, from making silos to ornamental horticulture.

"Agriculture is not just farming," Dennis states, "it is so much more. At amakia, we are breaking the stereotype of what agriculture is." Dennis plans that students often register to receive science credit and become involved in the variety of subjects he teaches—such as landscaping, animal husbandry and forestry and natural resources management.

Kamaki has a campus greenhouse, where vegetables are grown in the indoor learning method Dennis uses. Another success is his popular 4-H culture class, which includes a

made 800 cassettes," Dennis adds. He goes on to explain that the purpose of this class is to train students to arrange flowers and to experience retail business. "We do not compete with flower shops," he stresses, and adds that students do gain a real appreciation for the retail flower business.

Flower arranging is a talent Dennis inherited from his father, Ray, who was a bookkeeper for Columbia REA in Dayton when Dennis was growing up. "My parents had beautiful flower gardens," Dennis recalls. "My father received a lot of enjoyment from creating bouquets. He often took an attractive arrangement to work."

Along with teaching, Dennis is involved several hours a week as an advisor to Future Farmers of America (FFA), a companion organization to the classes he teaches. "FFA provides good leadership opportunities for students," Dennis says. His FFA was involved in 43 different leadership activities during the past school year!

Dennis recently had the opportunity to accompany 18 students to Japan as part of a Vocational Agriculture FFA exchange program representing Washington. They spent 18 days with agricultural families in Kobe, Hyogo,



Above, Dennis and Lori Munden and their children—Tracy, age 12; Jacob, 9; and Nena, 17—with the blue ribbon lands the gets raised.

... due to many 2 a.m. calls," he says, he received the "Medical Services Provider" award for 1999. Dennis also travels throughout the state teaching Industrial First Aid Certification classes

objectively. "They're a money crop," says Nena. "I'm looking at them as a way to college." When she is ready, she will sell her sheep to Tracy to continue breeding for other 4-Hers to buy. It's

Lori and Dennis Dayton. He recalls around the kitchen in construction going to Harbor dam, while Nena

students...I'd bring a bag of candy to school and say, 'whoever can name a career that doesn't require some level of agricultural knowledge gets a candy bar!' I would always come home with all my candy bars."

Since joining the Columbia REA Board in 2004, Dennis has continued to teach...and learn. Last year Dennis received his Director Gold Certification from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Director Gold is the highest level of Board Certification offered by the NRECA, and requires a multi-year commitment to continuing education.

"I am a strong proponent of continuing education, but it has to be done to the benefit of the Board and the membership," asserts Dennis. "I take that very seriously."

"Every conference I go to, I make sure to take an educational class," says Munden. "And I always bring back something I've learned to share with my fellow Board Members. My whole world has been in education, and the cooperative model is pretty unique. You don't get where you need to go without getting involved."

After a career in agriculture, it's no surprise that Dennis feels a certain kinship with the farmers, both large and small, among the REA membership.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to work in support of what our farmers are trying to do, from a power/energy point of view. I love to do that, because I understand what they're talking about and what they are trying to do," Dennis continues.

"It's also a professional challenge for me to be able to sit at the table with men and women who have committed their life's purpose to our electric utility, and to the people that they serve and to be able to interact on a professional basis with them."

"That's the cooperative way of doing business, and that's what I like."

preparing to take a year of maternity leave, on condition that she find a replacement for herself in the classroom. So I stepped in and took that program, and got it up and running good, then stepped away after a year."

But that break from teaching was short-lived as well.

"It kind of comes back to my philosophy of what I was doing in this world of education," says Dennis. "Everyone has kind of a calling. My career has been to go into programs that were brand new, or having difficulties of some sort, and do what I could do to put them in order."

While trying to find hay for his steers on Craig's list one day, destiny called again, and another teaching job found him.

"The AG teacher at Worden High School walked out without warning, so they were in bad need of someone to come in and get the program settled down so they could find a full-time replacement. So I did that, then I retired...for the second time."

That didn't last long either.

"My good friend, who organized all the Ag programs in Tri-Cities, called one day...and he wasn't calling to invite me to coffee," recalls Dennis with a smile.

Again, Dennis took on one more job, developing the new Ag. Sciences

program facilities at Riverview high School in Finley. Since then, retirement has seemed to take hold, but the teaching profession remembers the impact that Dennis Munden has had.

Among the many honors bestowed upon Dennis by his colleagues in education, both locally and nationally, he was recognized most recently as Agriculture Advisor of the Year by the Mid-Columbia Agriculture Hall of Fame. The Agriculture Advisor Award is given to an individual who has had a significant impact in ag-advancement and educational programs and similar organizations influencing the industry through leadership, guidance and community involvement.

Not only is Dennis passionate about teaching kids, he is passionate about what he teaches.

"Agriculture touches all of us, regardless of profession, place of residence or lifestyle. Agriculture teaching is career technical education. I tried to show my students the breadth of their opportunity. Agriculture is the science of the real world. Aquaculture, horticulture, natural resource management, food health and safety, environmental health and safety, financial management, irrigation, drones, GPS programming...even marketing."

"I used to play a game with my