

# Longtime Expo director prepares to step back

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

SPOKANE — When she first started with the Spokane Ag Expo, somebody told Myrna O'Leary that he didn't expect the show to last another five years.

That was in August 1988.

"Not on my watch," she said.

Now, after nearly three decades, O'Leary has decided this is her last year as the show's director.

"I just feel it's time for somebody else to take over," she said.

O'Leary plans to serve in a consulting or co-director capacity during the 2018 show, which will be her 30th, and help with the transition to a new director.

"It's going to be tough, because I love this job and love working with all of the agriculture people, farmers, exhibitors," she said. "When you work this job as long as I have, you develop friendships. Show week is not only kind of a reunion for the attendees, it is for me, too."

"It's sad, but we knew it was coming," said longtime Expo board member Bill Nelson, of Spokane Valley. "She puts her whole heart and soul into it. It's because of Myrna this show has been so successful."

O'Leary spent 14 years as assistant director of the Expo and 15 as director.

She takes pride in keeping the show running, profitable and all of the exhibitor booths sold out for many years.

"The show's always a challenge to



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Director Myrna O'Leary intends to retire from the Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum in 2017, and will serve on a consulting basis to help the transition in 2018.

keep something fresh," she said. "You have to have the machinery, the tires to kick, but it's a challenge to get something new there every year. That marriage of the two makes the show successful."

In recent years, finding volunteers has become a challenge, as many longtime helpers have retired.

Volunteer numbers average roughly 100 the week of the Expo. O'Leary also depends on volunteers to help determine the year's hottest topics.

"They're the ones that come up with all of this, and then I sew it or glue it all together to be the show," she said.

For the next director, O'Leary recommends having a good team of board and committee members.

"Work with them where you listen to

them and they listen to you, where you're a partnership," she said. "I'm so successful behind the scenes (because) I check, double-check and triple-check everything."

O'Leary grew up at Spokane's city limits, across the street from a large chicken farm. Her family then lived in Colfax, Wash., for a few years before returning.

She married into a cattle ranching family. Her jobs have included working at Spokane Produce and running a seed-packaging machine for Lilly Miller.

"I've always kind of had my hands in agriculture without even realizing it, one way or another," she said. "Ag was all around us. We knew agriculture was important. Sunday drives were into the country. Back then, Spokane was the ag hub. And still is, but people don't realize it."

Cheney, Wash., farmer and Expo board member David Dobbins thanked O'Leary for all of her work behind the scenes, and spoke of the need for more volunteers.

"I think a lot of younger-generation farmers take it for granted that shows like Ag Expo are around," he said.

Board member Nelson is hopeful for the future.

"There's a lot of work to do and there's changes to be made," he said, noting O'Leary and the board work each year to keep the show fresh. "As long as we continue on that path and keep it a farm show, I think it's going to be successful for who knows how long."

# Industry experts to offer market analysis, economic forecast

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

The outlook for wheat prices and the domestic and overseas market factors that impact them will be the topics during this year's Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum economic forecast.

Washington State University economics professor Randy Fortenbery and Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires will offer their analysis of the ever-changing outlook for the domestic economy and for trade.

Their presentation will begin at 9 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 8, in the convention center's lower level ballroom.

Important factors to watch in 2017 will be global supply, production in competing wheat-growing countries, weather, export competition and currency fluctuations, Squires said.



Randy Fortenbery

Squires recommends farmers also watch global economic conditions and U.S. trade policy.

"There were many statements made through the election process," he said. "We certainly are interested in ensuring we have good trading relations with Asia and Central and South America."

President-elect Donald Trump has said he will scuttle the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes Japan, one of the largest customers for Pacific Northwest wheat. The trade treaty also includes Mexico, Canada and other Pacific Rim nations.

Squires also plans to give a world market update.

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