

Joan Hyldegaard Fetty

April 25, 1936 – March 11, 2024

We are deeply saddened to share news of the passing of Whistling Wings Founding and Life Member Joan Fetty. Her passing leaves a gigantic hole in our hearts.



Joan and Bob Fetty receiving their Lifetime Membership Award from Whistling Wings HRC

If you knew Joan, no explanation of the voluminous superlatives that describe her is necessary. And if not, no explanation could possibly be sufficient.

Whistling Wings HRC Founding Member

Together with her husband Bob, Joan played a pivotal role in Founding Whistling Wings HRC. They were joined by Founding Members Katie & Robert Mearns (Robert “Bob” served as our first VP), Boyd & Deb Ulsh, Dale Worthington, and Kate & Pete Szilard.

Whistling Wings was the very first UKC Hunting Retriever Club in the Pacific Northwest, and also the first HRC club west of the Rocky Mountains. This important beginning led, in-turn, to the eventual creation of numerous HRC clubs in the Western United States and Western Canada, including 13 currently active HRC clubs: 6 in Washington state, 5 in Montana, 1 in Oregon, 1 in California, and 1 in British Columbia, Canada.

Even with the challenges that accompany such extraordinary growth, HRC continues to be the fastest growing retriever organization west of the Rocky Mountains.

Joan and Bob

Joan and Bob’s first dog together was a Golden Retriever puppy they trained, and then embarked on a competitive campaign that led to numerous obedience and tracking titles. They also raised, trained, and competed two additional Golden Retrievers before discovering simulated hunting competitions, which led to a whole new interest.

Upon observing that a more realistic type of hunt test existed on the East Coast, and in Southern States, Joan and Bob worked successfully to convince the UKC’s Hunting Retriever Club, Inc. to allow them to introduce HRC Hunt Tests on the West Coast. Their dream was that these new HRC clubs would grow in number. They have, and Bob enjoyed serving as the first president of Whistling Wings HRC.

Joan and Bob added a Chesapeake Bay Retriever to the family so that they could learn about working another breed of field dog. Earning many test and conformation titles with the dogs, they then trained, and help to judge AKC, CKC, NAHRA and finally UKC-HRC events.

Positive Dog Training school

Joan’s love of working with dogs led her open her own canine training facility - Positive Dog Training - 34 years ago, on February 8, 1990. The new school for canines was located adjacent to her home in Woodinville, WA on the Woodinville-Duvall Road.

Joan strongly encouraged her clients who had Retrievers to expand their activities and interests to fieldwork. She had a tiny little pond on her property, and even though it was small she was able to provide clients with a “tiny taste” of new kinds of fun and experiences that were possible with fieldwork. As a result, she was an important and prolific source of new participants in hunt tests, as well as new members in Whistling Wings HRC.

The Dog Training Community Icon

Joan was an Icon and Titan in the dog training community of the Pacific Northwest. Both experienced and newer trainers sought-out the opportunity to learn from her - especially in obedience, agility, and rally - and in many cases to work with, or for, her.

Joan developed deep and wide roots in the dog training community in the western United States: Any time she learned of a new dog trainer opening a business, she would visit them to get acquainted, learn more about them and their dogs, and offer encouragement. She was available and open in sharing her approaches to training, and her love of dogs and the business.

When Joan’s health began to significantly limit her abilities, she shuttered the Positive Dog Training School until it was reopened in 2019 by Shea Hughes-Gorman and Rosemary “Mitzi” Jorgensen who had trained with her. Shea estimates more than 20,000 dogs and their owners have been the beneficiaries of training at the Positive Dog Training School.

Generous Beyond Measure

Joan and Bob Fetty were extraordinarily generous in their support of local non-profit dog clubs, not just Whistling Wings HRC, but also Evergreen Golden Retriever Club, Puget Sound Labrador Retriever Association, and Rainier Hunting Retriever Club.

If Joan saw a need, or an opportunity to help, she always stepped-up and volunteered to make whatever difference was within her capabilities. She not only opened her dog training facility for club meetings and special events, she also arranged for Whistling Wings HRC to store the club trailer on her grounds between training days and events. Additionally, she donated guns, pop boxes and electronics to Whistling Wings HRC. Joan Fetty lived-out the axiom that “We make a ‘Living’ by what we get, but we make a ‘Life’ by what we give.”

Joan, who died on March 11th - and Bob, who passed in 2014 - are survived by their son Rob, and their grandchildren Bridget, Isabel, and Vin.

The magnitude of the immense sense of loss from Joan’s passing is also the precise measure of the blessing she was – and the memories of Joan and Bob continue to be – in the lives of those who were privileged to know them, or blessed to have the opportunity to “go to the line” at an HRC Hunt Test West of the Rockies.

- *Whistling Wings HRC*