



Volume 13, Issue 3
Sept 2025

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The Party Animal News

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In the Beginning

As a child, I was curious about nature. As a teen, this interest evolved into solving pest problems for customers. I remember treating really bad german cockroach infestations in homes with my brother and dad. The “thrill of the kill” popularized in the industry by Purdue’s most influential professor could certainly apply to my experience at that time. The pesticides we used in the 70’s had strong odors. When the pesticide producers started to develop “no odor” products, many customers thought we were being dishonest and not using chemicals anymore at their homes, until they saw the results.

I enjoyed a health related course in high school and considered going after a medical degree until passing out while watching a surgical film. I rightly determined I should do something else and decided to go into the family business. Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN had the best pest control program at the time, with a degree in Urban and Industrial Pest Control. My advisor was Dr. Gary Bennett. His dad owned a pest control company in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Gary was the same age as my dad and growing up he helped on termite jobs in the 1950’s and 60s. (On a side note, his dad brought in the first samples of the formosan termites in the 1960s to get identified, a whole story in itself.) Purdue started a pest control correspondence course in the 1960s and Gary’s mom took that course way before he ended up at Purdue. In my view, Purdue was perfect for me. A professor who was and actual exterminator?? The “Tool Time” Tim Allen character would be doing his pretend grunting.

What got me on the subject I’m about to discuss was a Sunday school lesson I heard from Tim Mackie, a podcaster I listen to while I drive around town. The title was, *The Spirit and the Fruit- I Am Who I Am*. It got me thinking about my first entomology class at Purdue. Mackie describes the effort it takes to be a gardener. He and his wife had planted a garden, but in it’s second year something devoured their plants. To produce food we cannot walk away and expect good results, we must be there nurturing and protecting the garden. Mackie goes on to discuss how a woodchuck attacked their garden and he had to catch it to stop it from eating everything.

The professors who taught my first entomology class were John MacDonald (passed away in 2017 at the age of 73) and Mark Deyrup. They gave a lecture on the insects in our world. Most people think bugs are just yucky. A lot of people ask, “Why do we have (fill in the blank with a bug)?” They basically debated between themselves the pros and cons. The professor’s pro counter argument from my frame of thought was genius. For example, termites in a forest breakdown the fallen wood and if this did not occur the fungus and mold would make a walk in the woods deadly. Look what happened in Australia when cattle and sheep were introduced on that continent. There was nothing native to breakdown the dung of these animals and the national salute for the Aussies of waving their hand in front of themselves to keep the flies away was born. Watch any Australian film and you will see what I mean on shots filmed outside. When dung beetles were introduced it cut the fly problem down by 90%.

Mark Deyrup was definitely not a conformist. I worried about my grades in the class. But I think he realized he got me to think more broadly than my pest control roots. As for Mark, his career had a different trajectory. He was the opposite of a gardener. You have to picture the West Lafayette, IN residential community at Purdue University like the M streets in east Dallas. Cottage homes with well kept lawns. Mark believed in just letting things grow and seeing what happened. Of course, the neighbors did not like this and I think they drove him away. He ended up at Archbold Biological Station in Florida for 40 years. He spent his time studying the insect community of the Florida scrub. He is the E.O. Wilson of Florida and has a published book on Ants of Florida. A unique guy that found his true home. His wife was a biologist who also worked at the station. But if I was to trust someone to put food on the table, it would be the bible nerd, Tim Mackie. I think the bug nerd, Mark Deyrup, would make us eat bugs he found in the scrub. He was more the Euell Gibbons type.



Mark Deyrup and wife

- David

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Vacation Time

At the end of October it will be time for us to have another week of vacation. We will be closed the last week of October, from the 27th thru Halloween. We will be back open the first Monday of November. Happy Fall!