

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,  
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**Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight:**

**Jolene Horn Snow**

By Bryan Painter

CARNEGIE, Okla. – Life’s not always a bed of roses on a canna farm.

Sure, at times there are fields streaked with red, yellow, pink and orange cannas – a real buffet for the eyes.

Rest assured, Jolene Horn Snow, 70, didn’t take that for granted as a child growing up near Carnegie, roughly 25 miles west of Anadarko.

“No one else in our area got to walk down rows of beautiful cannas hoeing weeds and moving irrigation pipe like we did,” Snow said. “There is nothing more beautiful than being in a field of over 100 acres of cannas in the cool of the morning.”

However, she also remembers that season at Horn Canna Farm 60 years ago this year.

In 1957 the crop of 110 acres froze, only a few loads were saved and used for planting stock the next year.

“This was financially devastating to my parents,” Snow said. “I really don’t know how they survived or really why they tried, but at no point did Daddy ever even consider giving up on his beloved cannas.”

## **Half-dozen then, 2 million now**

The story of Horn Canna Farm, Inc. dates to the 1920s when Jolene Horn Snow's grandmother, Frances Horn, received six canna bulbs from her aunt in Arkansas. Before long the cannas had claimed a large portion of the family's vegetable garden. That's when Snow's grandfather John Horn started taking cannas on his weekly vegetable routes to surrounding communities in the early 1920s. Even during tough times, his canna sales grew and became a significant source of income for the family.

An endeavor that started with six canna bulbs decades ago remains a family business four generations deep that now produces about 2 million bulbs annually.

They have shipped bulbs to not only other states, but to several countries including, Greece, Italy, Holland and Thailand.

When John and Frances Horn's son Neil was only 15 years old, he traded his parents a Jersey calf for the rights to the canna business. Instead of raising peanuts or cotton, or going the direction of wheat and cattle, Neil, Jolene's father, believed he could make a go of it with a tropical plant in Caddo County.

He created equipment that would make this work, both the harvest equipment and the washing apparatus. He believed in these plants. He married Jolene's mother, Louise Horn, three days before he was shipped off to World War II. So he always told people that he married her to take care of his cannas.

That love of cannas within the family was passed from Neil and Louise Horn to their daughter Jolene and her husband Butch.

Neil passed away in May 1988 at age 75. With some help, Louise continued to run the farm for a few months. However, in September of that year, on a Sunday afternoon, Louise stopped by to see Jolene and Butch. She told them she was going to sell the canna farm.

"We couldn't have been more shocked," Snow said. "She talked a little while, and I heard myself say, 'We will help you.' I couldn't believe what I heard myself say, but I couldn't imagine the canna farm being gone. I felt a deep and sincere

obligation to my grandparents and Daddy and the legacy they had worked so hard to create and build.”

Jolene, at the time, was working for the new owners of her father-in-law’s propane business, and Butch had a hay baling business and was farming. So it wasn’t the best time to make such a change.

However a little background provides a clearer picture of Horn Canna Farm during this time period. In the 1970s her parents had made some good business decisions and in the early 1980s profited from some mineral rights during the oil boom. They used some of this money for new equipment such as tractors, a pivot irrigation system, trucks and other items.

“I guess some people would have taken the royalty money, sold the farm and lived happily ever after, but my Daddy would have never considered stopping growing cannas,” Snow said.

Jolene quit her job at the propane business and started working for her mother in October 1988, in time for harvest. Butch also helped with harvest. The following spring he sold his farming operation and started working full-time at Horn Canna Farm.

Louise sold the farm to Jolene and Butch in summer 1993 and a few months later learned she had cancer. She passed away the day after Thanksgiving in 1994, at age 71.

Jolene and Butch Snow took the entrepreneurial spirit of her parents – and grandparents – and added many improvements including streamlining the harvesting process.

They also took their product to home and garden shows.

“The show at Tulsa was the largest,” Snow said. “Often, we would run out of sacked canna bulbs on the table, people would grab the sacks and wave their money thinking we were out of cannas, not knowing we had a trailer full. There have been many successes and accomplishments Butch and I have had with the

Horn Canna Farm that I would love to share with Daddy, but the frenzy of people almost fighting over cannas would be at the top.”

Butch and Jolene have a daughter Shelley and her husband Kerry, who live in Oklahoma City and have four children, and a son Dustin and his wife Nikki, who have five children and live at the Horn Canna Farm.

Dustin and Nikki joined the business in 1994, adding computers to help with ordering and shipments. Jolene and Butch retired from the daily operations of the farm in 2008. Butch Snow passed away on April 17, 2016.

Generation by generation, the cannas are passed along. The plants never fail to fascinate Jolene.

“An amazement of God’s creation is that an ugly canna bulb,” Snow said, “can be put into the ground and grow to a tall, beautiful plant with a big, gorgeous flower on top.”

### **Beautifully different**

Over time, when there were struggles such as bill collectors coming around or no money for the repair of broken equipment or just daily needs, Jolene recalls thinking to herself, “I just wish we had a normal life.” By her definition, that would have meant her father was a wheat farmer and her mother was a school teacher.

“Today, I am so glad we didn’t have a ‘normal’ life,” she said.

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Editor’s note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The

honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.

Photo caption (Photo by Sandy Settle): Jolene, and late husband Butch, are shown amid some of their many beautiful cannas. Jolene is being recognized as a significant woman in Oklahoma agriculture.

