Retired UGA blueberry and small fruit horticulturist Gerard Kreuer, left, holds a container of a new blueberry variety named in his honor. UGA blueberry breeder Scott NeSmith, right, named the new cultivar in honor of Kreuer in recognition of his 20 years of service to Georgia’s blueberry industry.

New blueberry cultivar honors pioneer Kreuer

BY MERRITT MELANCON  UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Retired University of Georgia blueberry horticulturist Gerard Kreuer worked for years to help get Georgia’s blueberry industry off the ground and his contributions have been recognized with his own blueberry cultivar.

Scott NeSmith, UGA’s chief blueberry breeder, recently introduced his newest blueberry variety — an early-harvest rabbiteye with large, easy-to-pick fruit — as “the Kreuer.”

“Dr. Kreuer worked tirelessly to serve the industry all of his career, and he introduced me to the blueberry industry,” NeSmith said. “He and I worked together on blueberries for more than 20 years. It seemed only fitting that Dr. Kreuer be honored with a variety named after him. His legacy of service to the industry will last for years to come and is worthy of honor and emulation.”

NeSmith introduced the new berry cultivar to blueberry growers at the Southeast Regional Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference in Savannah earlier this month.

The new cultivar produces very large berries that ripen relatively early for a rabbiteye variety, likely in late May to early June in south Georgia. The cultivar is perfect for pick-your-own farms, backyard gardeners and commercial blueberry operations, NeSmith said.

“I am deeply honored that a blueberry has been named for me,” Kreuer said. “I appreciate the great work that Dr. NeSmith is doing in carrying on the 70 years of tradition in blueberry breeding at the University of Georgia. He is making a big impact on industry with his new cultivars such as Rebel, Vernon and SuziBlue.”

Kreuer worked with south Georgia farmers to fine-tune the best production practices for blueberries in Georgia. He conducted the variety trials and mulch, fertilization and pruning research that have helped Georgia blueberry growers become the most productive in the nation.

Georgia’s blueberry acreage increased from less than 1500 acres to close to 20,000 acres between 1983, when Kreuer became UGA Extension’s blueberry production specialist, and 2011, when Kreuer retired. He had previously worked for UGA Extension as a county agent for several years in the 1970s.

Kreuer now owns and operates Harriet’s Bluff Farm, a pick-your-own organic blueberry farm in Woodbine.

Just released in late 2014, the Kreuer has not been licensed by nursery growers, but it should be available soon.

For more information about growing the Kreuer cultivar, call UGA’s technology commercialization office at 706-542-5942 or check Georgia’s Integrated Cultivar Release System at georgiacultivars.com/cultivars/blueberries.

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