

## The aging are former ag editor's beat now

Arizona's 1979 Senior Citizen of the Year is John Burnham, the UA College of Agriculture's consultant on programs for the aging. Burnham, who edited *Progressive Agriculture in Arizona* for 12 years, accepted a plaque from Governor Bruce Babbitt May 11 in Phoenix.

Burnham's weekly column, "Common Sense for Seniors," appears in more than 30 newspapers and is broadcast by several radio stations. State agencies in New Mexico, California, New York, Colorado, and Florida also use the column. At age 75, Burnham is Vice President of the Pima County Council for Senior Citizens, a member of the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging and active in other organizations for the most experienced tenth of the population.

He came to Arizona in the mid-1950s, seasoned as a newspaperman in Wisconsin and North Dakota. His personal warmth and frank concern for others have earned Burnham hundreds of friends throughout the state. Many of them in Tucson congratulated him at a reception in the Old Agriculture Building the week his award was announced.

Burnham made the following comments when asked recently to outline the main problems facing Arizona's seniors:

"In Arizona and throughout the nation, the principal problem areas of the elderly are first, economics, second, health care, and thirdly, transportation for the rural elderly and housing for urban elderly.

"The elderly get the brunt of inflation, trying to live comfortably in the late 1970s on dollars earned in the 1950s and 1960s. Those dollars are pitifully eroded.

"Health care and its cost loom large as a problem area of the elderly. Organizations of the elderly—Gray Panthers, American Association of Retired Persons and the National Council of Senior Citizens—all strongly urge a national health-care plan which would greatly aid all age groups from birth to death.

"Emphasis in such a plan would be on preventive health maintenance. As one gray-haired philosopher said at a Prescott meeting last June, 'After all, you don't wait for your car to be smashed up before you take it in for a checkup. Surely we should have the same concern for our bodies.'

"Several national health insurance plans are introduced in the Congress at each session, but we do not anticipate early passage of a satisfactory bill. A four-part lobby—doctors, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and health insurance companies—strenuously oppose any bill which would take from them any portion of the billions of dollars Americans pour into health care annually.

"Transportation for the rural elderly and handicapped who cannot drive automobiles is traumatic. Access to doctors, stores, public agencies, even friends, is sharply curtailed. An old person living miles from town is in a constantly hazardous position should accident or illness strike.

"In the urban centers, housing for the low-income, including low-income elderly, has been slow in coming and pitifully little as compared to the need. For low-income Americans, elderly and otherwise, sharp increases in the cost of housing and utilities probably add up as the greatest cause of malnutrition. Your Social Security check or other slim income has just so many dollars. When rent goes up \$60 and utilities \$30, there is that much less for food. The fixed costs come first and the food budget suffers."



John Burnham is congratulated for his Senior Citizen of the Year title by Governor Bruce Babbitt, above, and by Dean Darrel Metcalfe, left.