

Simply put, Black Hawk College alumnus Marion Calmer has changed farming.

The Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA) named the East Campus graduate as a co-recipient of its 2020 Distinguished Alumnus Award. The association presented him with the award at the BHC Board of Trustees meeting on Sept. 24.

Calmer, an Alpha resident, earned his BHC Associate in Applied Science in [Agriculture Production Technology](#) in 1978. He is the founder/owner/CEO of Calmer Corn Heads and president of Calmer's Ag Research Center, the largest independently funded, farmer-run ag research center in the United States.

"You're a little unique. You started your own business, started your own research operation," trustee Steve Spivey said during the award presentation.

"From your research operation you came up with the idea we needed to grow corn in narrower rows, except nobody made the equipment to pick it in narrow rows, so you took it upon yourself to come up with that, and you've grown it into a very, very successful operation," he said.



Black Hawk College alumnus Marion Calmer of Alpha is the co-recipient of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association 2020 Distinguished Alumnus Award.

The ICCTA Distinguished Alumnus Award winners have:

- outstanding success and distinction in their chosen field
- humanitarian service that has proven to greatly beneficial to society
- continued interest in and support of education and community colleges
- overcome life's obstacles
- completed a program at an Illinois public community college

Other Black Hawk College ICCTA Distinguished Alumnus Award winners include Chad Pregracke, founder of Living Lands & Waters, who received the honor in 2007, and William Albracht, a retired special agent for the United States Secret Service who was a co-recipient in 2018.

Calmer invented the world's first 12-inch and 15-inch corn heads. These ultra-narrow rows allow higher yields and profitability and also have environmentally friendly benefits including erosion control and natural weed control.

He has been named one of agriculture's 25 most influential people, voted one of the 40 No-Till legends nationwide and received the Public Image of Agriculture Award. Calmer has more than a dozen patents for harvesting technologies that have revolutionized how corn is grown and managed around the world.



Black Hawk College agriculture students with alumnus Marion Calmer during the Calmer Ag Research Center's 33rd Annual Combine Clinic during the Fall 2020 semester.

"In the early days, it was tough, and today, I'm living a fairy tale," he said. "I am so honored."

Calmer recognizes his Black Hawk College education as key to his success, noting that with the knowledge of scientific protocol instilled in him at Black Hawk College, he went on to create Calmer's Ag Research Center.

"Black Hawk College instructors helped me recognize my inventive skills," he said. "The hands-on approach I learned enabled me to dream bigger, which resulted in my revolutionary harvesting inventions. I will be forever thankful for my community college experience and education."

Calmer continues to give back to Black Hawk College. He has hosted annual harvest and safety seminars for BHC students since 1988 and is a generous, long-time supporter of the [Black Hawk College East Foundation](#). His support has provided scholarships for students and program enrichment.

"I love what I can do for our local community," Calmer said. "I love what I can do for our local college."

## Share this:

- [Click to share on Twitter \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to email a link to a friend \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [Click to print \(Opens in new window\)](#)
- [More](#)