

TRIBUTE TO SAM JONES (1924-2018)

Samuel Jones, beloved South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center Orchid Curator since 1996, passed away Sunday, June 3, 2018, at age 93. Sam served on the Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens Board of Directors from 1995-98. During that time, he secured the Donald Larkin memorial orchid collection for the Gardens, then designed and supervised building of the Don Larkin Memorial Orchid Greenhouse, our first Orchid House, which included rain gutters and underground water storage. This became the “cornerstone” exhibit for the Botanical Gardens, giving the infant attraction early credibility due to the size and significance of the collection. As the Gardens grew, Sam and the Orchid House were featured in *Texas Monthly* magazine.

As smaller collections were added, he and his orchid volunteers realized more space was needed. Displays were raised vertically as far as possible, and an outdoor hanging display was added. In 2015, the \$450,000 Samuel Jones Orchid Conservatory, and attached support greenhouse were completed, thanks to major donor Ed Rachal Foundation.

In May, 2018, his wish for Reverse Osmosis Water Purification (RO System) for the orchids became reality, thanks to a \$20,000 donation by Sam’s friend and admirer, Dr. Gaylord Hoyt and wife Sue.

Since 1996, when the original collection was installed, he spent every morning in the Orchid House, then Orchid Conservatory, caring for and propagating nearly 2000 plants, helped by a loyal corps of volunteers. Due to the amount of time Sam dedicated to the orchid collection, he actually had two families—his wife, Wanda, who passed away in 2016, three children Kathryn, Cynthia and Mark, plus grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and his Botanical Gardens family—staff, volunteers and Board members.

Sam also taught orchid seminars, and later “Orchid-ology”, an ongoing free class the first Thursday of each month in Education Station, attended by orchid growers from novice to advanced. He wrote two orchid care booklets during his curating tenure. He eventually saw the need for an annual Botanical Gardens “Orchid Show”, which became popular both for growers and visitors.

The Botanical Gardens was just one facet of Sam’s life, which also included active duty in World War II, on several ships in the Pacific Theater, in the United States Navy; a career with General Electric in New York; part-time commercial photography; and scoutmaster. No matter what connection people had to Sam Jones, they recognized in him a special, generous and caring man, who is missed deeply by all of us.

