

Paul & Sherry Cummings

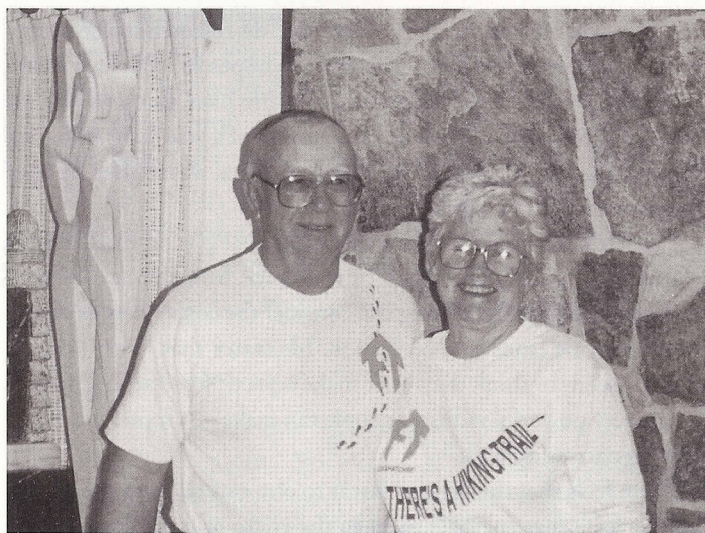
Past President of FNPS (Sherry) and first Palm Beach Chapter President (Paul)

Interview by Christine Lockhart, Palm Beach Chapter

A trek down a dirt road will lead you to the home of Paul and Sherry Cummings, two of the pioneers and founders of the Palm Beach Chapter of FNPS. In the late 1970s, there were no native plant nurseries in Broward or Palm Beach Counties. A birding trip to Sanibel-Captiva Island led the Cummings to visit a fledgling native plant nursery there, which prompted them to establish one of the first native plant nurseries in Palm Beach County. Their nurs-

ery was one of the few retail sources for native plants outside of Homestead. A few months after the first state meeting of FNPS was held in 1980, the Cummings were inspired to help form the local chapter with about eight to ten like-minded people.

Paul is a man of diverse talents and travels. Born on New Year's Day in 1932 in Upper Michigan, he grew up in Michigan and Wisconsin before joining the Air Force at age 17. After 22 years in the service, he lived in Tennessee before moving to Boca Raton, Florida, in 1970. He has lived in Boynton Beach since 1978. A sculptor since his youth, Paul once had an art store in Boca, and continues to teach sculpting in various media, but mostly in alabaster. Sherry describes Paul as a man of great patience and an inspiration to many artists.



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As the first president of the local chapter, Paul has helped to cultivate and promote the use of native plants in landscaping and on roadsides. He is pleased with the direction that the FNPS has gone over the years, particularly with the message of restoration and preservation. His advice to the general membership is to “keep pushing,” and for the U.S. as a whole to find a way to restrict the entry of non-native plants. Control of invasive plants like melaleuca, Brazilian pepper, Australian pine, and *Lygodium* will be a never-ending battle. Without restrictions, the next invasive exotic plant is just around the corner. Paul sees the prevention and control of exotic plants as our biggest challenge for the future. He is pleased with some of the great improvements in recent years; for example, counties and cities are now requiring native plants to be part of new landscapes, and native plants are more readily available.

Sherry Cummings is a native Floridian, born in Winter Park in 1936. Working with plants came naturally for Sherry. Her father was a plant inspector for the Florida Department of Agriculture, and both her grandparents were enthusiastic plant-growing hobbyists. Sherry spent many years as an elementary school teacher. In 1974, she brought something in to be framed at Paul's art store, and the rest is history.

When she was president of FNPS in the 1980s, Sherry instituted the first Silver and Green Palmetto recognition awards and helped FNPS become independent from its parent organization,

the Florida Conservation Foundation. One concern she has is that FNPS may appear to be an extremist group. It doesn't help our purpose if people, especially in the nursery industry, view us as too extreme. The Association of Florida Native Nurseries (AFNN) has been very instrumental in promoting the idea of using natives for landscaping in Florida. The publications also help to relay the message. Actions such as allowing for the use and enjoyment of lands purchased with bond funds enable people to see what they've purchased, experience the beauty, appreciate it more, and want to preserve it. The biggest challenge, Sherry expects, will be to keep our message fresh in the public eye, and keep up the momentum. FNPS is headed in the right direction, but it's important to reach out and get new people involved.

Sherry views the education of both children and adults on the value of native plants as the greatest need for the future. Some people think native plants are boring but a good landscaper can use textures and shades of green to make the use of native plants look interesting. The trick is to teach designers with professors that know Florida, rather than teaching principles commonplace in California or North Carolina. Butterfly gardens are another way to promote Florida's wildflowers. If people can see the beauty in things, they will follow those ideas.

The love of reading and nature has involved Sherry in many volunteer activities. She volunteers at the Boynton Beach library, is a nature guide, and leads birding trips. Both she and Paul are active with the Florida Trail Association.

If you can't find Paul and Sherry at home, they're usually outdoors somewhere. In 1999, they hiked down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back. They also enjoy taking their two grandsons canoeing down the Rio Grande or hiking when they visit them in Texas.

Ruth Danforth

Founding Officer, Coccoloba Chapter

Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski, Coccoloba Chapter

To meet Ruth Danforth is to love her. Ruth is a down-to-earth (no pun intended) rural Florida lady who loves people and plants. She is a generous lady who often donates plants to the plant raffles and auctions held at each Coccoloba Chapter meeting, as well as donating them to the habitat project at Manatee Park.

Ruth's husband, Dan, lived in Florida as a child, but moved to Ohio as a young man. Ruth met him when he was a friend of her brother's, and Dan and Ruth both sang in the same church choir. They continued to live in Ohio after they were married and while their children were young, but when the Ohio Turnpike came close to their front yard, they moved to Florida (in 1957).

Ruth and Dan soon found a beautiful piece of land in Alva, Florida, that was full of live oaks, palms, palmettos and other native vegetation. They bought the land 40 years ago and in 1972, Ruth started a nursery on the land – Dan's Nursery on Tuckaho Road in