ment and would allow an exchange of information.
When he arrived in South Florida, very little printed information about plants and their communities was available. The notes by John Kunkel Small (from his early, brief travels through South Florida) were it, essentially. However, Dan knew that other local individuals, mostly non-professionals, had a wealth of information and observations to share. Dan wanted to tap into this source by bringing these people together.

When Dan was asked about his thoughts on the future of FNPS, he said that things can always be improved. However, he is very pleased with the direction that the organization is going and feels it has become a positive voice in the state. Dan's word of wisdom for FNPS members is "Don't be afraid to ask questions, ask everybody and anybody, call up the professors to seek your answers. Also, become involved."

He feels that we need to promote the society more and make sure people know that FNPS can be found on the web. He also suggested that in addition to targeting the Hispanic communities with the new brochure, we should all target the smaller, but growing, Creole-French speaking community.

On the future of FNPS, I mentioned that over the last few years the number of FNPS members has remained the same, while costs have gone up. His response was that a number of organizations he belongs to have declining membership and at least we are holding our own.

Dan has received accolades from his peers over the years, including numerous nominations for Distinguished Teacher Awards and certificates of appreciation from county and local governments. In 1993, he received the Green Palmetto Award for Science and Education. He received a second Green Palmetto in 1995 for outstanding contributions.

Dan has written or collaborated on several books. They include The Florida of John Kunkel Small, Pine Rockland - Plant Guide, a series of plant identification guides for coastal hammocks, coastal dunes, scrub communities; and a soon to be published guide for pine flatwoods. He has published a tremendous number of scientific papers - so many, his Curriculum Vitae resembles a book in its length.

In 1985, Dan and Dr. Grace Iverson produced a document entitled "Inventory of Native Ecosystems in Palm Beach County" which identified and described some of the critical remaining natural areas in Palm Beach County. This document was instrumental in providing justification for passage of the $100 million bond referendum in 1992. Through the referendum, Palm Beach County has purchased over 22,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land.

Dan has also been involved in the Society of Economic Botany for a number of years. He is currently on the journal's editorial board as the Book Review Editor. In the past, he has coedited some of his graduate students (myself included) to do book reviews for the journal.

He has been involved with the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FEPPC) since around 1991 and proudly wears the moniker of caretaker of the FEPPC Pest Plant List, which is reviewed and updated every two years. In 1999, he received the Outstanding Mem-

ber Award for his work on developing and maintaining the pest plant list.

When asked to cite some accomplishments that FNPS should be proud of, he notes The Palmetto, to which he has been a frequent contributor. He considers it an outstanding communication between the membership.

Dan has a number of other interests, but he mainly likes to visit different places and get out in the field. He also frequents different libraries to look up rare books or visits other herbaria to study their collections of plants. Staying in Everglades City and hiking around the Fakahatchee Strand is a holiday for him. In fact, the Fakahatchee Strand and Big Cypress area are his favorite places in South Florida and he has taken many students and others on hikes into these areas. Outside Florida, he likes to visit and do research in the mountainous regions of southern Arizona. He hopes to retire in this area of Arizona in the next five to six years. He likes its openness and smaller population. He has fond memories of a year-long sabbatical that he and Sandy took to southern Arizona, where they camped out over a hundred nights.

He feels the greatest challenge facing FNPS (and FEPPC) in the next few years will be flack, or resistance, from the horticultural industry to do the right thing and consider the consequences of promoting exotic landscape vegetation. He states that "They [the industry] seem to think they can't make a profit from selling natives. Some very powerful industry people can make our future work promoting natives difficult."

Dan feels that the biggest threat to our natural areas are people, and he fears that encroachment to the edges of these areas will increase as the population increases. He hopes that FNPS can help change people's view of plants. Dan feels that most people in First World countries think of plants as furniture. This concept is a result of too many people concentrated in urban areas. Plants are living things and deserving of the same consideration as other creatures.

It will be difficult for many of us when Dan Austin retires and moves away to Arizona. However, I am sure we will all welcome to stop in on him and Sandy when we are in the area. You can even take your unidentified plant specimens along. Just remember that Dan doesn't do grasses.

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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.

Paul & Sherry Cummings

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, Coccobola Chapter

Interview by JoAnne Trebatsoski, Coccobola 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 Coccobola 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 Tuckahoe Road in