

cruiting plug for FNPS. Almost every chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society has tasted his native cuisine and every month our Tarflower Chapter still has an opportunity to taste the goodies made from native edibles in season that month. He has presented his programs in many of the local schools within the Central Florida area. Dick has received the "Silver Beaver Award" from the Boy Scouts of America and received so many other awards that there is not have enough room on his walls to display them all.

In 1992, the Florida Native Plant Society presented Dick with the Green Palmetto Award for his service to the society and in 1998 he was presented with the Mentor Award. These plaques and several of the awards from the Boy Scouts are proudly displayed on the wall as you enter through the front door of his home.

This self taught naturalist who loved plants since he could crawl, journeyman jeweler, farmer, mail carrier, scout leader, and author of *Florida's Incredible Wild Edibles* strikes an imposing image as he speaks of his many adventures. Even though he is almost 80 years old, you can still find him with his walking stick and backpack hiking through the woods and hammocks of Florida. He always takes the time to point out which plants are edible and the numerous ways to prepare them. When you are with him in the woods, you do not have to worry about going hungry. Around each bend in the trail is always something good to snack on or a new delicacy to try. When asked if there were any thoughts of wisdom he would like to share with members of the society, without hesitation he said "Enjoy Nature!"

Don & Joyce Gann

Past President, Dade Chapter (Joyce) and
Legendary Native Nurserymen

Interview by Diane Otis, Dade Chapter

The Ganns are both Dade County, Florida natives who were raised and made their lives in Dade, mostly in the Perrine, Homestead, and Redland agricultural areas. Don farmed tomatoes for 30 years. Joyce raised a family, attended college, and worked as a Dade County Park Naturalist before opening their nursery. The Ganns remember the Homestead-Redland area of the 40s and 50s when it was a small community and "everybody knew everybody else."

Joyce's interest in native plants developed during her elementary school years when studying native plants was part of her girl scout troop's program. The troop participated in the planting of a native arboretum in Homestead in the mid-1940s on the county-owned grounds where the troop met. This restoration was a full-scale community operation including resources from the girl scouts, local Rotary Club, City of Homestead, Dade County, and others, and which involved the transplanting of mature trees with the use of convict labor and many volunteers. Although the understory has been lost, the mature trees of the project still stand today at the corner of Fourth Street and Fourth Avenue in Homestead.

As a young man, Don rode his bicycle all over the Homestead-



Don & Joyce Gann

Redland area and learned to appreciate the land. From the beginning, Don has been interested in the various habitats, the high, low, wet, and dry areas, and the rare flora that made certain parcels of land unique and valuable. Don describes a particular hammock that he used to relax in during his farming years as being "like a cathedral."

Eventually, the Ganns had an opportunity to buy some acreage and build a custom house. They were torn between living in a hammock or a pineland. They eventually chose the hammock habitat and had a local architect and student of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alfred Browning Parker, design the home – choosing exposures, building materials, and air circulation patterns suitable for hammock living without air conditioning. "The architect saved us his fee by having the lumber cut to exact measurements without any waste," Joyce told me.

The Ganns have made major contributions to our Florida environment, FNPS, and the Dade Chapter of FNPS. They were present at the first organizational meeting of FNPS and were also instrumental in the formation of the Dade Chapter.

Joyce remembers the first organizational conference of FNPS. People were sitting on the floor because the number of participants far exceeded expectation. She recalls being inspired in brainstorming sessions, realizing the enthusiasm of the group and the diversity of interests in native plants and the varied backgrounds and professions of the people interested. She realized that this was going to be a strong, viable organization and not "a group of little old ladies in tennis shoes who will only want to know where the rare native plants are so they can rip them off," as had been expressed to her by a local native plant enthusiast. After the conference, Joyce and Don called their son, George, who was away at college, and told him about this wonderful new group that was being organized, full of people who loved native plants as much as they did.

Joyce remembers meeting people from around Florida at that first conference, who eventually became friends over the years. Some she has lost contact with, but many she and Don still keep in touch with, if only at annual conferences. Joyce also felt the growing pains as FNPS voted to become independent from the Florida Conser-

vation Foundation which had carried the organization through the early years.

Joyce contributed to the growth of FNPS by becoming the Southeast Area District Director, helping form and promote chapters in Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, Dade, and Collier Counties. She was also active in the Association of Florida Native Nurseries (AFNN). Prior to formation of the AFNN, Joyce helped organize a FNPS-sponsored booth at the Florida Nurserymen and Allied Trade Show.

Joyce was the first President of the Dade Chapter of FNPS. She has been a member of the Native Plant Workshop, a study group in Dade, since the 1960s. She was an active speaker on native plants and their benefits in landscaping and for wildlife and spoke at Dade County Commission meetings on various issues relating to native plants. She was a member of the South Florida Water Management District Committee which drafted the tri-county Model Landscape Code for Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties (representing the perspective of the native plant movement and industry.) From the 1970s through the 1990s, she was a member on various landscape and agricultural committees. Joyce was a member of the Board of Supervisors of the South Dade Soil and Water Conservation District in the early 1990s. She presented workshops for Master Gardeners and other groups on native plant identification and uses, and has published numerous articles for *The Fairchild Tropical Garden Bulletin* and other publications.

As the first FNPS chapters were being organized, Joyce was proud to see already established community organizations pitch in with resources, helping the “new group in town” get off and running. For example, in Dade County, Fairchild Tropical Garden allowed FNPS (the Dade Chapter) to set up an organizational table at their annual Ramble, and the interest shown that day was overwhelming. Tropical Audubon gave FNPS a room for board meetings and help with organization. Overlap in membership and interest in ecologically-oriented groups promoted and continue to promote such community support.

The activity Joyce is most proud of is helping to compile and coordinate native plant information presented in Miami-Dade County’s last two Landscape Code Manuals, as well as successful efforts to bring into the code a 30% minimum requirement for the use of native trees and shrubs in new non-homeowner landscaping in Miami-Dade County.

Also a charter member of FNPS, Don Gann has given talks and demonstrations on native plants at a number of chapters and at state conferences, and has helped with plant identification on field trips. He has helped to plant pine seedlings at local sites and has helped to select sites in Miami-Dade County to propose for purchase by the Florida Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) program.

In 1992, Don became a member of the Miami-Dade County Land Acquisition selection committee for Environmentally Endangered Land Programs. He is still serving on that committee. Don considers this work his most important accomplishment. “I feel the people of Miami Dade County will have some native lands preserved because this program has been set up not only to purchase, but to

also maintain these lands. We go on field trips to look at all applications and have public hearings for each site. Then the County Commission votes on our recommendations.” Many of Dade’s rarest plant communities exist only in small isolated parcels. Don feels that without the work of this group and their knowledge of the land and lesser-known native plants, the commission may not have chosen to purchase some of the small, but significant lands that are the last refuge of some of Miami-Dade’s most endangered plants.

Joyce and Don are also co-recipients of the FNPS Green Palmetto Award and the Dade Chapter’s Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Award for Service.

The Ganns learned about native plants by attending meetings of the Native Plant Workshop and taking courses at Miami-Dade Community College, Florida International University, and the University of Miami. They also spent many hours comparing notes with local naturalists and botanizers, both amateur and professional. They are grateful for knowledge gleaned from FNPS conferences and for the many publications on native plants since the society began.

As they listened to nursery customers over the years, the Ganns have seen their clients change from people who didn’t know how to use a native plant or even what one was, or what it “was good for,” to meeting customers who knew they wanted a bird habitat, or a butterfly garden, or who were going to build a hammock or pineland in their yard “from scratch” and brought their references and resource lists with them. The Ganns have been glad to see families become interested in natives as the result of children’s exposure at school, usually in butterfly gardens. Joyce and Don also say that they have seen increased interest in native plants by Hispanic families since FNPS began its Hispanic Outreach Program.

The Ganns reminded me of a time when there was no Florida Native Plant Society and an appreciation for and understanding of native plants was rare, information was hard to come by, and native areas were considered land yet to be developed or cleared for farming, rather than habitats or preserves. They watched their native pinelands and hammocks succumb to bulldozers and decided they wanted to do something before it all disappeared.

“We joined with others to form the Florida Native Plant Society. We strongly felt the organization was needed,” Don said. “At the time it looked like few people knew or cared about native plants and their communities. Through education from all over the state by FNPS members, that [the situation] has changed and new counties, cities, and the state are aware of a need to save some of the native lands.”

Don said FNPS did this by bringing together people with many diverse reasons to want to preserve some of old Florida – people that like birds and butterflies, wildlife, hiking, the solitude to be had while out on these native lands, and conservation of land, water, and beaches. He feels that FNPS has helped to make county, city and state governments more aware of the need to preserve more public native lands. FNPS also made it possible to publish books and pamphlets on native plants and wildlife which may not have been produced otherwise.

Both Ganns feel that the local FNPS chapters are critical to the success of the organization. Chapters in each area of the state are

key to promoting education on a grassroots level, preserving local lands, and preserving the genetic diversity of their local flora.

What do the Ganns feel future priorities should be? Don's priorities are outreach and education. "The reaching out of FNPS members to groups outside the society, to school children, teachers, and homeowners is vital because they are our future members". Don is especially proud of FNPS's Hispanic Outreach Program and hopes outreach efforts will eventually cover the state. Don also feels one of the challenges of the future will be determining how the public can use and enjoy native preserves without destroying them. We might have neighborhoods adopt a local natural park, then teach about that specific community and how to care for it. Maybe FNPS can be a clearing house for ideas about successful attempts and new ways to use the lands and still protect them.

Joyce foresees increasing use of and interest in natives for landscaping, restoration, wildlife conservation, preservation of endangered species, both in the private sector and by agencies as education on the value of native plants captures the public's interest.

She feels strong conferences around the state are necessary to help maintain contacts and keep information up-to-date. A strong and active state board is important as well. She feels The Palmetto should continue as it has in the past and that FNPS should support other publications and educational programs such as Dade's Hispanic Outreach. She also hopes that FNPS will continue to promote research and education, continue to assist chapters with their special needs and do more to encourage commercial memberships.

Now that the Ganns have closed their nursery, you might figure that they plan to relax – not too much! Their plans include restoring some of their former nursery land to hammock and pineland, to continue experimentation with the propagation of local wildflowers and grasses, to write and publish literature (maybe a book) on the propagation and use of native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, and to visit lesser-known country towns and wild places around Florida, gathering information which they someday hope will be published as a guide. So you see, the Ganns may have closed their nursery, but they haven't really "retired." They are just moving on to another phase of their life mission.