From the late 1950s until 1971, he worked on satellite launches at Cape Canaveral (and some are still in space!). His work then took him and Peggy to Minnesota for eight years.

After their return to Florida, and after his retirement, Don began his term as Membership Chair for FNPS in 1988. At that time, Don inherited current lists of names of the 1100 memberships, one computer disk, and original membership applications. Don computerized all of this information and created a comprehensive database. He encouraged past members to rejoin or renew. The membership more than doubled (up to 2,600) while he served the organization as membership chair, from 1988 through 1995. His initial effort was recognized with a Silver Palmetto award presented in 1989 for membership. In 1990, Don compiled a 10-year history of FNPS, which was published in The Palmetto, and wrote again in 1995 with the 15-year history. Don "retired" again when Peggy retired as editor of The Palmetto.

One of the biggest changes Don has noticed is in the finances. During the first ten to twelve years, the organization operated on a financial shoestring and the financial impact had to be considered before every decision. Don and Peggy reminisced about a situation in the mid 1980s when the numbers were cut so short for a run of The Palmetto that when the printer spoiled too many copies, there weren't enough copies to send to all of the members! But the story turned around about 1990. Membership was up and the conferences were doing well. Along with the growth in membership came reduced costs, increased revenue from publications, a prospering Endowment Fund, and donors.

As to the future, "FNPS is going great guns," asserts Don. "They are doing a lot of things right."

Together

Don and Peggy came to their present West Orange County home in Woodsmere, on the shore of Lake Lucy, 20 years ago when they moved back to Florida from Minnesota. Peggy's grandparents lived on Lake Lucy from 1914. Her father grew up here and in 1935, her parents bought property on Lake Lucy, and this property has been in the family ever since. When her parents retired, they moved back to Lake Lucy, and when Don and Peggy escaped from Minnesota they also moved back to Lake Lucy.

Don and Peggy bought five acres in the woods, intending to build in the future, and moved into a nearby house until they were ready to build. Instead they remodeled, and have lived in their home ever since.

When they moved into their house, the land had a lawn. It is now a jungle, with sword fern, beautyberry, and cherry laurel growing amuck. "What I plant, dies; what comes up, thrives," is Peggy's observation.

Don and Peggy have always been members of the Tarflower Chapter, and are also members of the Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Wekiva, and Friends of Lake Apopka. Peggy is now again editing The Oasis for Orange Audubon. Once an editor, always an editor!

Don and Peggy also have four children and five grandchildren, scattered in Atlanta, Washington D.C., Oregon, and New Jersey - certainly their greatest accomplishment together.

Dick Workman

Past President of FNPS
Author of Growing Native: Native Plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida

Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski

Dick Workman

Dick Workman is considered "Mr. Native Plant Society" to folks in Lee county. He is a founding member of the Florida Native Plant Society and the author of Growing Native: Native plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida. He grew up on a farm in Waynesville, Ohio, where he developed an interest in natural systems. After studying zoology at Miami University in Ohio, the Air Force led him to the Mojave Desert and an interest in plants. He began an active role in environmental protection in 1969, and organized an event for the first Earth Day in 1970 on the campus of Victor Valley College in Victorville, California.

In 1973, Dick moved to Florida to assume the job of administrative director of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. While there, he initiated the use of prescribed fire to manage interior marshes, the active control of exotic pest plants, and started the SCCF's Native Plant Nursery. He was active in the formation of the City of Sanibel and served as the chairman of the first vegetation committee that wrote Sanibel's first vegetation ordinance. He is a vocal proponent of the protection of native plant communities and has advised individuals and governments on the subject throughout Florida and the West Indies. He is currently president of
"Supporting and educating regulators is important, but it is equally or more important that every member of the FNPS protect or restore a little piece of natural Florida in his or her neighborhood and help connect and attach these natural systems into corridors."

Dick has served for several years as the President of the Coccoloba Chapter and also has served as President of FNPS. He continues to be an active member of the Coccoloba Chapter and to serve as a Director at Large for the state organization.

Dick’s most memorable and noteworthy memory of the Florida Native Plant Society was the meeting that took place at the Sanibel-Captiva Foundation in 1979 with Bill Partington and his late wife [see interview in Spring Issue, Vol. 20, No. 1]. Dick, in conversation, said to them that he thought that the time was right to formally organize the people who were interested in Florida native plants. The Sanibel-Captiva Native Nursery had already been started. Joyce Gann had started the first nursery doing research on native plants and was making information available to the public. The University of Florida was involved. Bill Partington agreed, so Dick contacted the Arizona and Utah Native Plant societies for information on their organizations, and an organizational meeting was held at Bill’s office with people who were interested in forming a Florida native plant group. Thus the Florida Native Plant Society was born. Dick describes that historic meeting as a most memorable one with diverse characters and opinions.

Another memorable happening Dick remembers was when George Allen, owner of Allen’s Nursery in Homestead, Florida, introduced Fakahatchee Grass (Tripsacum sp.) at an annual meeting of the Florida Native Plant Society. Dick says it was especially exciting to see how quickly horticulturists began propagating Fakahatchee Grass after George’s introduction.

When Dick was asked what he saw for the future of the Florida Native Plant Society, he had lots of important words – I hope that I have gotten them down on paper with integrity and accuracy. Here are Dick’s words as best I could record them:

“The Florida Native Plant Society is always going to be a small group of people who have a deep, concerted cerebral development in the area of native plants as it applies to fixing the ills of the planet. Only a small percentage of the populace can meet that criteria. However, we want to continue to encourage more people to use and appreciate native plants. Inroads will be made.”

“If the Florida Native Plant society wants to have major impact, we need first to involve and influence lawmakers and regulators at all levels of government. Secondly, the FNPS needs to help educate and establish an aware populace to support the ordinances and laws that come out of these governing bodies. And the members of the FNPS need to support conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy.”

“Supporting and educating regulators is important, but it is equally or more important that every member of the FNPS protect or restore a little piece of natural Florida in his or her neighborhood and to help connect and attach these natural systems into corridors.”

Recently Dick was doing some work in rural Highlands county and he was surprised at how rapidly the “near little natural places” were disappearing in rural Florida.” He said: “If we depend on government and regulators to save natural Florida it won’t happen. The inefficiencies embedded in government will prevent it from happening. Natural Florida has to be saved by private individuals and groups like the Florida Native Plant Society.”

Dick Workman is indeed the embodiment of these ideas and ideals. He is recognized in Lee County and throughout Florida, and well respected as he walks the walk as well as talking the talk. May his words and his example give us all inspiration and energy, and long-range commitment to FNPS ideals. Thank you, Dick, for your leadership.

Editor’s Note: Once again, we thank all of the very special folks featured here for their concern and work on behalf of Florida’s native flora and the Florida Native Plant Society. We are indebted to these and other early members for wise guidance and much toil, providing a strong foundation on which FNPS can continue to grow. Interviewers, we are indebted to you also for capturing for us these gems of FNPS history.

Member Profiles Wanted for Future Issues of The Palmetto
1000-1500 words plus photo
Contact Cameron Donaldson, Editor, for suggested outline.
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