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](image)

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 while they visit them in Texas.

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**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
Alva. Don’t let the name fool you. The nursery is Ruth’s. Dan supported her decision to open the nursery but let her know in no uncertain terms that he would not be involved. Ruth continues to work the nursery with the help of a few other people and she is 73 years young.

Her nursery is a delight to visit. She has both native and non-native plants. Her property itself is gorgeous with Spanish Moss draped oaks and a pond surrounded by native wetland plants. Her peacocks will greet you and follow you about, waiting for a handout of a caterpillar or two. If you are looking for a larger sized native plant, or a hard-to-find species such as yellow elder, call Ruth and she may very well have it.

In June of 1981, Jean Burnhardt, another nurserywoman who was serving as FNPS Membership Chair at that time, and Ruth decided that they would attend the FNPS conference at Rollins College in Winter Park. When asked why she and Jean decided to attend the conference, Ruth said that they believed more native nurseries were needed in Lee County, so they went to learn about native plants so that they could include them in their nurseries. Ruth tells me that she has a photograph of the plant sale and everyone having lunch under a large tree at the conference.

Ruth and Jean came away from the conference convinced to start an FNPS chapter in Lee County. Jean was chosen to be president and Ruth was secretary and treasurer. The new chapter began meeting in people’s homes and when their numbers grew, they began to meet at Terry Park and eventually the Calusa Nature Center, where the chapter continues to meet now.

Ruth has served as unofficial photographic historian for the Coccoloba Chapter for many years and keeps a picture album of significant events in the chapter’s life. She also keeps news clippings about the organization. Ruth will proudly tell you that she has every copy of The Palmetto starting with the 1981 issue.

Ruth belongs to two garden clubs, LeHigh Acres and the Alva Garden Club. She has given demonstrations and spread the word about natives through those organizations. She says that being in the nursery business, she encourages people to use native plants in the landscape. Many folks come to tour her nursery and learn about natives. She recently had folks from Glades County come to take a tour. Her husband, Dan, has a little park to take people through to show them the natives there.

Native plant sales are one of Ruth’s favorite activities with FNPS. Ruth is a natural educator and loves the education that is part of native plant sales. Ruth remembers the first native plant sale at the Coccoloba Chapter held at the Calusa Nature Center and though they didn’t have large numbers of plants to sell, chapter members did talk (and talk and talk) to people about natives. Ruth says, “Our plant sales are much larger now than then, but we sure did a lot of educating at those sales.” Ruth is still working hard at each of the chapter’s plant sales. She shares so much information with customers; they love her and often visit her nursery after the sale.

Last year, when the Coccoloba Chapter was asking for people to take oak leaves to use as mulch in the hardwood hammock area being restored at Manatee Park, guess who raked and delivered about 30 large garbage bags of oak leaves? Yes, it was Ruth.

Ruth wishes that she had more time to be even more active in FNPS, but her nursery business takes a lot of her time. She says that she likes what the Coccoloba Chapter is doing with its native plant sale, native plant workshop, monthly newsletter, and community projects such as the one at Manatee Park, and advises us to “just keep up the good work.”

Ruth is a great example of how one person can make a difference. Keep on educating folks about native plants, Ruth!

"Dick Deuerling
Field gourmand
Interview by Sharon Lynch, Tarflower Chapter"

Near the Deuerling fireplace, a lifetime's collection of plant books and newsletters are displayed on bookshelves that go all the way to the ceiling. There are even the "little wee books" Dick used as a younger to help him identify the many plants, trees, butterflies, and birds found in the woods outside of the city where he was born. When asked how long he had been interested in plants, Dick's response was "since I could crawl."

Richard J. Deuerling was born at home in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, on November 12, 1920. In 1939, he graduated from Allegheny High School and "being pretty good at arts and crafts," his teacher procured him a job making the high school's jewelry at a local jewelry company. For the next several years, he worked 48 hours a week making high school class rings and pins for the graduating classes. He was paid $7 a week for all this creative work. After not receiving a higher salary, he left the company and took a job with a company manufacturing many different kinds of jewelry, and ended up being a journeyman jeweler.

After serving in the Army Air Corps 8th and 9th Air Force from 1941 to 1946, Dick decided he wanted to do something else besides...