

## **Ruth Danforth**

Founding Officer, Coccoloba Chapter

**Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski, Coccoloba Chapter**

**T**o 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



**Ruth Danforth** (left, with Mary Burnhardt, right)

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 Cocoloba 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 that the Cocoloba Chapter held was 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 Cocoloba Chapter was asking for people to rake 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 Cocoloba 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**

**N**ear 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 youngster 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