

The

Understory

Newsletter of the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Inc.

August - September 2009

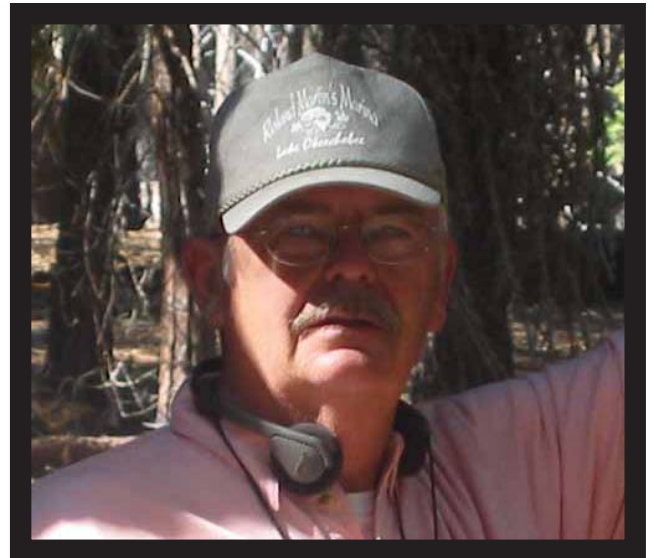


Farewell Judith Buhrman – In Tribute to a Life Well Lived

Judith Buhrman was instrumental in founding the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and served as our President during its first three years. During her time with us, she was a significant driving force behind everything we accomplished and she laid the groundwork for all that came after. Since many of you may not have known Judith personally, I would like to share this eulogy for my dear friend.

Craig Huegel

Judith Buhrman passed away in the early morning hours of July 2 and left a gaping hole that will never be filled. She was a great many things to a great many people, but I counted her one of my best friends. To me, that is the most significant thing in my relationship with her. During our years together, she provided a sounding board for more ideas than I can possibly account for, a shoulder to weather troubles on, and an ocean of support when I
(Judith Buhrman, cont. page 9)



In Memory of Mike Kenton

Mike Kenton passed away on Tuesday July 14 after a multi-year battle against brain cancer. Mike was intimately involved with the Serenoa Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society after moving from Clearwater to Sarasota many years ago, but his history and ours were tied together well before that. Most of the current membership may not remember Mike from those days. This eulogy reflects on my personal relationship with Mike and is my effort to keep alive some of his vitality. Craig Huegel

To me, Mike Kenton will always be larger than life. He approached everything full speed and with the enthusiasm and curiosity of a child. He lived to teach and he always remained open to learn. It was that combination that I will never forget.

Mike loved plants. Some of us use plants to achieve a purpose and/or adopt a subset of them for personal
(Mike Kenton, cont. page 10)

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President's Message: Summertime

“Summertime and the living is easy. Fish are jumping and the cotton is high.” Gershwin probably was not a gardener and obviously didn’t live in Florida. Summertime here for someone who gardens is a real challenge. Hot sticky weather, frequent deluges of rain, the constant threat of tropical storms... and, George, it’s not the cotton that’s high but the weeds. With the coming of the rains, the weeds seem to jump up overnight and can easily get ahead of even a dedicated gardener. Having a landscape with native plants is no reprieve from weed issues since most of us have gardens, not restorations of wild lands. The gardener has to use time judiciously; going out early in the day to do weed combat. Evening hours are not comfortable with the heat index above 90° F well past the setting of the sun, but it may be the only time you have available if you work a 9-5 job. Ideally, one gets the undesirables before they go to seed and proliferate. A case in point: in the yard of one of my landscape customers, the spurge and spotted spurge recently grew so quickly and so shockingly abundant that for a moment I entertained the idea of leaving it as ground cover. Wishful thinking! Heroic effort was the only way out.

As for the activities of our Chapter, summertime brings the opportunity to plan our programs and field trips for the year ahead. These events are the main way we interface

with our members and the general public, and are important in educating them about native plants and native plant communities. Do you have a topic for a program that you would like to learn about or a place that you would like to explore as a field trip?

Another important summertime event is the formation of the nominating committee and the search for candidates as officers and members of the board of directors. This is a very critical activity since what is achieved is nothing less than the establishment of the Chapter leadership for the coming year. Do you have someone in mind that might be good in one of these positions? As a member, you can nominate someone you feel would best support our Chapter in a leadership role. It might even be yourself, if you have the interest to really get involved.

These two activities are a serious responsibility for everyone who cares about our Chapter and wants to see it thrive. Please help by contributing suggestions for possible program speakers, field trips, and nominations for officers and board members. You are welcome to make those suggestions to any current board member or to me at billbilodeau@verizon.net or 727-488-3163.

“Summertime and the living’s not easy. I’ve got weeds to kill and the temperature’s high. My knees are aching and I’m sweating like crazy, but hush little mindset, doon’t you cry.”

-- *Bill Bilodeau*



2008 Pinellas Chapter Landscape Tour

Chapter Calendar

Meetings: **New Meeting Place! Pinellas County Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo.**

Program, Wed., August 5, 7:00 pm:

Beginning of Life: Understanding a Marine Estuary
Speaker: Barbara Hoffman, MS in Marine botany; and former Pinellas FNPS President

Barbara Hoffman will present a program on seagrasses and other plants found in a marine ecosystem, as well as the many creatures that depend on them. Join us for a look beneath the surface and learn about these very special and highly adapted species.

Field Trip, Saturday, August 15, 9:00 am:

Snorkeling the seagrasses at Ft. DeSoto Park

Barb spent much time reviewing sites to find us the very best one, and chose Ft. DeSoto (one of America's Top Ten beaches!) because of the variety of life we will see. We will start at the very end of East Beach (see below), where the beach is shallow and has abundant areas of turtle grass and shoal grass. Also, the mangrove peninsula here has a nice variety of salt-tolerant plants. After snorkeling for a while, we will pull the nets that Barb set earlier in the morning to see what creatures are living in the seagrass bed.

After snorkeling the seagrass, we will drive about ½ mile to a picnic area for lunch. After lunch we will do some more snorkeling/wading off this beach to observe manatee grass. Even if you aren't into snorkeling, please come anyway. The water is shallow for wading and we will be able to share much of what we see with those of you who don't snorkel.

For those who are able to stay longer, there is a nature trail that we can explore - and the pier will provide some good views of the gulf. and hopefully some dolphins and fish. This will be a fun trip and a wonderful chance to experience Florida's coastal ecosystems. Please plan to join us.

Plan to bring a picnic lunch, snorkeling (mask and snorkel) gear, sunscreen, bug spray, towels, beach chair/ beach gear of your choice, and drinking water. Ft. DeSoto has some mean sandspurs so closed toes are recommended.

Directions: Ft. DeSoto is west of the 54th Ave. S exit off I-275 at the south end of Pinellas County. Follow the signs after you exit west. There is a nominal toll and a small entrance fee. Go into Ft. Desoto and continue straight until the road "T's" at the large American flag. Turn left and follow the road all the way to the end. This is the far eastern end of East Beach. There are lots of picnic tables at the lunch spot and we will claim several as soon as we get there.

Registration: This field trip is open to everyone, but you **do need to register** with us. Contact person is: Alexa Wilcox-Huegel (727) 422-4792

Program, Wed., September 2: Native Plants on Display - 2009 Landscape Tour Preview

Field Trip, Sat. and Sun., Sept 26 & 27: Pinellas Chapter Landscape Tour

Program, Wed. October 7, 7:00 pm:

The Beauty of Florida's Sandhill Community

Speaker: Craig Huegel, Ph.D.

Chapter member, Dr. Craig Huegel, will provide an in-depth look at one of Florida's most beautiful natural communities; the Florida Sandhill. Sandhills are one of the most diverse ecosystems in North America, but are now globally imperiled. Join us for a very visual tour of some of its most interesting plants and wildlife.

Field Trip, Saturday, Oct. 17:

Sandhill Ecosystem in Ocala National Forest (with Camping/Overnight option)

We are announcing the October Field Trip a bit early to give you time to reserve a campsite in case you wish to stay over Saturday night. Alexa and Craig Huegel have already reserved a site at the **Juniper Springs Campground** and they would love to have you join them – if you can. If interested in this, you will need to make your own reservations at the campground. This site fills up early, so don't dawdle!

The Field Trip itself is to one of the most wonderful sandhill areas left in Florida; the **Riverside Island Tract** in Ocala National Forest. What makes the Riverside Island Tract

(October field trip, cont.)

so special is that it is one of the few remaining longleaf pine forests that has been managed appropriately with prescribed fire. Because of this, the conditions present when the first settlers came to Florida have been maintained and the great diversity of plants and wildlife are intact. The overstory of longleaf pine and turkey oak is open and park-like and the understory is dominated by wiregrass, lop-sided indiagrass and a wide variety of wildflowers. The fall season shows this ecosystem at it's most beautiful. We will see several species of blazing stars, *Carphephorus*, goldenasters, and much much more. We will plan to visit several distinct areas within the Tract to see the response of these plants to fire; visiting areas that have recently burned and those that were burned more than a year ago.

This is an easy hike and we will not be straying too far from our vehicles at any one time. We plan to drive to different areas and explore for a while in each. Please wear appropriate clothing and closed-toe shoes. We may encounter chiggers, so bring repellent to spray your boots and pant legs. You will want to also bring a hat, sunscreen, and plenty of drinking water. Cameras and binoculars also are recommended. This is a prime area for red-cockaded woodpeckers and we are likely to see some; along with fox squirrels and other sandhill wildlife. Bring a lunch and join us after the morning hike for a quick dip in Juniper Springs and a short hike to see the rare yellow Florida anise in its natural habitat.

Dr. Craig Huegel will be our leader for this trip. You will need to purchase a day pass to enter Ocala National Forest. The cost per car is \$4.00.

For more information, and details of carpooling times and meeting places, please contact

Alexa Wilcox-Huegel, (727) 422-4792, or alexa776@tampabay.rr.com

Camping Option: Craig & Alexa are going to camp for the weekend at beautiful Juniper Springs Campground inside Ocala National Forest - a short distance from the hiking spot - and they invite anyone else who is interested in camping to make reservations with them. (They are tent-camping, but RV areas are available as well). If you are interested in camping, please contact Alexa asap to make reservations: (727) 422-4792.

To reserve a camping spot at Juniper Springs, and for additional information, photos and a site map, go to www.recreation.gov. (Craig and Alexa will be camping Friday and Saturday nights, October 16-17, in the Fern Hammock section)

If you stay overnight, please plan to join us for a closer look at some of the scrub ecosystem also present in Ocala National Forest. Craig and Alexa will lead a short walk on Sunday morning to look at some of the plants and wildlife. There are some real rarities here and maybe we'll get lucky and see them.

The Riverside Island Tract in Ocala National Forest, photo by Craig Huegel



Money Matters

by Jane Williams, Chapter Treasurer

For some time now, I have thought it worthwhile to share with all of you my world of Chapter finances; to explain where our income comes from and where the money gets spent. As a 501(C)3 Not-for-Profit Corporation, the Pinellas Chapter is obligated by the state to report these things. I've been thinking that it is perhaps time to let you all in on it too. Hence the article below:

Where does our operating income come from?

First, our Chapter receives a partial return from the money our members submit to the state for dues - either new memberships or renewing ones. In the 2008 fiscal year, that amount was \$2,350; a substantial contribution to our operating income.

Additionally, we made \$1,000 from our book sales and silent auctions, and \$2,300 from co-hosting the state conference. Of course, the income from the state conference is not something we receive annually, but we occasionally have other income from special events and fund-raisers. Our two annual Plant Sales - one in the spring and one in the fall - are major money-makers for the Chapter. This past year, we made a profit of \$3,860. The December Conservation Celebration also normally nets us some additional income. In December 2008, that amount totaled \$400.

Total income for the 2008 fiscal year was \$9,968.

Where does the money go?

We raise money, but we also spend it – on Chapter operating expenses, membership services, and on projects related to our Chapter's mission. Our administrative costs are associated with what it takes to keep the organization running. This category includes stamps, license fees from the state, booth fees when we set up a Chapter display, replacement of worn out equipment, maintaining the telephone number, etc. These types

of expenses cost the Chapter \$1,500 during the 2008 fiscal year. We spent another \$380 producing the printed materials we distribute to the general public at public events such as the Green Expo, and at speaking engagements, such as when we are asked to speak using our CD "In Harmony with Nature".

Membership Services include fees to reimburse speakers' expenses when they have to come from out of town, the cost to produce and distribute the newsletter, the cost to maintain our Website, and the cost of drinks and snacks provided at our monthly meetings. Last year we spent \$970.

Lastly, the fun part of spending money is supporting projects we identify each year as meeting our mission as a Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. We maintain memberships in various conservation organizations: specifically, The Friends of Boyd Hill Nature Park, the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, and the Association of Florida Native Nurseries. We also support a variety of scholarships to send children to summer nature camps. Last fiscal year, we spent \$1,250 for 5 such scholarships. We contribute labor and materials for various conservation and restoration projects; such as signage at Moccasin Lake Nature Park and plants at Weedon Island Preserve. Total expenditures for all such projects last year was \$3,725. Of course, that does not include volunteer hours which we supply in great amounts.

Total expenses for the year was \$6,570.

Each year, your Board is tasked with developing a budget and identifying necessary and worthwhile projects to fund with the money we anticipate. We are doing our best to work effectively within our budget while maintaining some cushion for those unforeseen emergencies. We hope you approve.



Spider lily

Field Trip: In Search of Ferns, Brooker Creek Preserve, June 13, 2009

by Janie Bridges

The Chapter's June Field trip was to a large cypress swamp at the southern end of Brooker Creek Preserve, near Tarpon Springs. More than 20 participants spent nearly 2 hours exploring this area off trail, looking for ferns and whatever else was encountered. Although a few of us stumbled into a yellow jacket nest and felt their wrath up close and personal, we made it out alive and in good spirits. The following article was written by member, Janie Bridges.

In search of native ferns, 24 enthusiastic FNPS members trekked through a large swamp in Brooker Creek Preserve. As soon as we assembled, two ospreys made their presence known, high overhead, as they protested our trespass into their domain. Florida has the widest variety of ferns in the U.S., except for Hawaii and Puerto Rico - some 164 varieties with 123 of them native. Our June fern survey found swamp, royal, cinnamon, bracken, southern shield, resurrection, golden polypody, and netted and Virginia chain ferns. We examined a variety of the fronds to closely look at the patterns of the sori and other features that help identify them. The swamp was without paths, and we walked for several hours in the shade created by a canopy of pond cypress, black gum, white-barked dahoon holly, and red maple. We encountered many other trees and shrubs on our walk besides these: sugarberry, sparkleberry, buttonbush, sweetbay magnolia, American elm, Carolina willow, red mulberry, myrsine, and swamp dogwood. Deep in the swamp, we found a small oak hammock with an understory dominated by jack-in-the-pulpits - so many that we had to be careful with our steps not to crush them. But, June is past their blooming season and we missed the chance to enjoy their flowers. Highlights of our June field trip included viewing plentiful butterfly orchids growing on black gum trees and a few clusters of a leafless jingle-bell orchid on the buttonbush. On the way back to our vehicles, we sighted two swallowtail kites; definitely an exciting conclusion and a Brooker Creek moment to remember.



Our field trip leader, Craig Huegel, shows us an area of swamp fern. Photo by Paul Francois of the Pasco Chapter.

Pinellas Chapter Landscape Tour: Save the Dates Sept. 26 & 27

The days are long, the temperature's high and the rains are here. It must be time for the native plant landscape tour. Once again, the tour committee is scouring the county in search of yards that demonstrate both aesthetic and functional use of native plants in the landscape.

The tour will take place on Saturday and Sunday, September 26th & 27th. The times for the tours are the same as last year (8 am – 1 pm and 12 pm – 4 pm respectively) and the price is the bargain barrel price of \$5/tour for non-members and free for FNPS members.

It is not too late to nominate a yard for the tour. If you know of a suitable native yard (at least 70% native), please send the contact information to: Jim McGinity, e-mail: jimmcginity@verizon.net. We will also be looking for knowledgeable volunteers to assist with registration and in the yards during the tour. So put the dates on your calendar and I hope to see you all on this year's tour!

Field Trip: Canoeing the Santa Fe River, July 2009

The following article was written by one of our newest members, Ginny Nelson, who joined us for our recent Chapter kayak/canoe paddle down the Santa Fe River, near High Springs, Alachua County. More than 20 of us took off down the River that Saturday morning and enjoyed the 5 hour trip on one of Florida's most beautiful streams. The Santa Fe is largely a spring-fed stream and the water is cool and clear. Along the way, we stopped at several of the springs for refreshing dips and, of course, we slowed down at times to view the flora and fauna. The River canopy is diverse and included many hardwood trees not seen in Pinellas; overcup oak, green ash, water hickory, box elder, blue beech, green & parsley haws – just name a few. Several of us saw manatees and river otters and a very few saw the Mississippi kite. The weather was perfect and the company was great. We were joined by members of the Pasco Chapter as well, so it was nice getting to know a number of new people. A few of us stayed a bit later in High Springs and had dinner at the Great Outdoors Restaurant. Hint: try the peanut brittle ice cream pie... Craig Huegel

A Thank You Note from Ginny Nelson: a New Member (originally from Illinois and Colorado)

Wow! I am so grateful for the fun company and the enriching experience of my 1st field trip with folks from the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. On Saturday July 11th, we paddled a part of the Santa Fe River, sharing sights that included: the solemn groups of cypress trees, growing straight and tall on the banks, the surprise and brief appearance of a river otter and the shadowy sighting of a rarely-seen limpkin, and all the plants, like the delicate green fly orchids blooming along the length of overhanging horizontal tree limbs and spider lilies blooming in the sun near the water. For me, it was a unique and memorable

Florida river experience. I thank each of you for your kindness and sharing during the day.

During the drive home, I mentioned my effort to learn more about Florida ecology and native species. The following list of books was shared with me, and I wish to share them with you. One of the books is newer and so might even be of interest to you more knowledgeable members. I'm looking forward to receiving additional reading suggestions.

This newer book is by a beloved author and looks good. **Florida Rivers** by Charles R. Boning. It is about Florida rivers and their cultural and natural history.

Florida Wildflowers in their Natural Community by Walter Kingsley Taylor. This is a good book for an overview of plant communities and the wild flowers found in them.

Priceless Florida: Natural Ecosystems and Native Species by Eleanor Noss Whitney. Another good one for an overview of Florida's ecosystems and the flora and fauna found in the system. It has great pictures.



Photos by Jim McGinity

(Judith Buhrman, cont. from page 1)

needed affirmation. She was one thing on the outside and another below the surface.

I met Judith sometime around 1988 or '89. I'm not sure of the date exactly and it's not that important to me. What I do remember, very vividly, is the vision of the woman as I met her for the first time; a floppy hat, a bit over zealous for my tastes, and thorny as an acacia. I was working as one of three Urban Wildlife Extension Specialists for the University of Florida and was housed at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension office in Largo. I had just begun work on a native plant landscape there and Judith had just registered to be a Master Gardener. The office felt we were made for each other, but the reality was that they had no idea whatsoever what to do with her. So, they sent her over to me. I was not that thrilled initially.

Judith became my acolyte and both of us were a bit uneasy by this relationship. What I learned early was that Judith had passion. She did not do anything halfway. When she decided to take something on, she embraced it fully. She learned everything she could about what was important and then she set about teaching others.

Judith was passionate about the environment, among a great many other things. She was already an avid birder, but she wanted more than to simply catalog birds. She understood that birds existed because of habitat and she wanted to learn more about the plants that formed that foundation. So, each week, she worked in the native plant landscape – and we talked.

At that time, there was no Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society in Pinellas. The closest Chapter was in Hillsborough, east of Tampa and outside of Mango. For those of us wanting to learn more about Florida's native plants, this meant driving 1 ½ hours each way every month to attend their programs and interact with folks that shared our interest. I had been going for nearly a year when I first met Judith. It didn't take her nearly that long to realize that Pinellas needed its own Chapter if she was ever going to make a difference teaching people about plants and habitat. We needed a local presence. We took those first steps one night around Joyce King's kitchen table

and Judith became our first President. Judith was always willing to take a leadership role if she thought she could make a difference doing it.

For the next three years, Judith did everything in her power to make the Chapter a vibrant organization with a mission to make a difference. She was a tireless spokesperson, a project organizer, a visionary, a very effective leader, and the “head cook and bottle washer” of the Pinellas Chapter. There was nothing we did that did not have her fingerprints on it. We took on the state conference in the second year of our existence and we forever changed the way that conference was held. If you ever attended FNPS state conferences pre-Judith, you know exactly what I mean. One change we made was to add in some fun. Judith was never against having some fun. She just had hers in a bit more dignified way than some.

Despite her many accomplishments with us, Judith was not defined by her work with the Florida Native Plant Society. She was a tireless Audubon activist, the first President of the Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve, and involved in nearly every other environmental cause that needed a champion. Her hand was in nearly everything – whether you saw it or not. She was an ecological activist, not an environmental one. She made that distinction and she was proud of it.

Judith had one of the keenest intellects of anyone I have ever known. She chose her words with careful thought. She did not shoot from the hip, but she could gun you down just the same – if she thought you needed it. She had strong opinions, and she felt they were warranted. After all, hers were derived only after careful study of the issue. Perhaps, yours were less researched. . . . She was not born a scientist, but she learned to speak as one.

Words were important to Judith and she used them as effectively as anyone I've met to communicate ideas. She was an incredible writer and she spent a great many hours at it in one form or another. Take these examples from two very disparate sources and you get a feel for what it was to be Judith the communicator:

To the Editor (New York Times): *The Aug. 21 front-page article in the “Debate Over Darwin” series says,*

(Judith Buhrman, cont. page 9)

(Judith Buhrman, cont. from page 8)

“As much philosophical worldview as scientific hypothesis, intelligent design challenges Darwin’s theory of natural selection by arguing that some organisms are too complex to be explained by evolution alone, pointing to the possibility of supernatural influences.”

Intelligent design is not a scientific hypothesis. It is not testable. It is reasoning from incredulity.

None of the “scholars” promoting intelligent design have produced a scintilla of evidence to back up their claims. It is only the woeful lack of scientific literacy in this country that gives this false “controversy” any legs at all.

Judith Buhrman

Seminole Fla., Aug. 21, 2005

And . . . Tuesday, October 12, 1999, 4:16 pm:
I suggest “frass” for B. S. (which I take not to mean Bachelor of Science). Frass is insect excrement, but carries none of the baggage of the Anglo-Saxon term. Further, it is monosyllabic, satisfyingly sibilant, and unknown to the vast majority. Ten-year-olds will think it naughty when described as “bug poop.” There is always the serviceable and likewise monosyllabic and emphatic “scat,” again a biological term for animal, particularly mammal and reptile, droppings. Thus “B. S.” can be interpreted as “Bear Scat!” or (highly pungent) “Boar Scat!” Or of course, “Bull Scat!”

Whether you agree with her opinions or not, you can’t ignore her style. . . . When Judith took something apart, she thoroughly dissected it.

Judith wrote in everything from the Bird Watcher’s Digest to the St. Petersburg Times. During the last few years, she combined her love and knowledge of classical music, her words, and her critical eye to write a regular column for the Times reviewing new classical music releases. She loved Mahler and Wagner and she once sang opera in New York City. Though you would never get her do it publicly, Judith had a beautiful voice.

That voice and that life force have passed on now and all of us are poorer for its loss, but greatly enriched by the time we were given. Good-bye dear friend.

(Mike Kenton, cont. from page 1)

reasons. Mike simply was fascinated by plants in general. He loved the beautiful ones and the ugly, the rare ones and the common. He did not discriminate; he was fascinated by them all. He soaked up everything he could on every plant he encountered. He grew most of them at one time or another as he developed his native plant nursery; Environmental Equities. But, he mostly used this information to teach others. That was his real calling.

Mike was my very first mentor after arriving in Pinellas County in 1987 and my most important one. I was eager to learn about Florida and its ecology and I knew absolutely nothing. I stumbled onto Mike through a mutual friend, Greg Howe, who was a new employee at Moccasin Lake Nature Park and so began my several-decades relationship.

Mike delighted in taking Greg and I out to natural areas and quizzing us on what we were looking at. I will never forget one of those days, 20 years ago now, as Mike led us to a wooded area across from Countryside High School that he was hoping to get Clearwater to purchase. He called it “Magnolia Falls”, for the many large sweetbay onsite. As we entered and skirted the edge of a young cypress swamp, Mike stopped and asked us to identify a small sapling hardwood. I hadn’t a clue what I was looking at and I could see the gleam in Mike’s eyes as I stumbled through a couple of bad guesses. He loved the game he was playing with us. “Pagoda oak”, Mike triumphantly announced – like we should have known. “I planted it a couple of months ago. I wanted to see how it would do.”

Over the years, I learned a great deal from Mike and I spent more time with him than I could ever accurately add up. Those years are filled with fond memories. Times we shared rooms at various state FNPS conferences. Times he would ask me to take cuttings off my new purchases of something unusual. Times he would bring his unusual plants to our plant sales and sell every one of them to the Chapter members the night before. No doubt, we used to get volunteers to help set up our plant sales solely so they could buy Mike’s plants the night before the sales opened to the public. Then, he’d go to dinner with us and talk plants. He never passed up an opportunity to be with people that appreciated plants.

(Mike Kenton, cont. on page 10)

(Mike Kenton, cont. from page 9)

Mike was the most creative force I have ever met in the Florida Native Plant nursery business. He propagated species I had never heard about and he was always looking for something new to try. If there was something truly “weird” that I was looking for, I knew I could call Mike and likely find that he had one somewhere in the recesses of his nursery. There are so many species now in the trade that Mike first started – and far too few that are no longer available now that he is gone. He was a good businessman, but he did not grow things because of the market. He grew them to create one.

Mike was a vital force in the development of our Chapter. He was there from the beginning. His workshops and programs were always our best and we could always count on him to help – any time and in every way. All of us will miss this in some way now that he has passed. What I will miss most of all, however, is his friendship and the way he got excited simply talking about a plant. I will truly miss my friend – Mike Kenton.

River oats, photo by Jan Allyn



Plant Profile: River Oats **(*Chasmanthium latifolium*)**

by Jane Williams

River oats, alias spike grass, is a perennial grass with toothed leaves that may reach three feet tall. Its common name comes from its seed heads which resemble those of sea oats and occur on long drooping stalks in summer. I have used this plant extensively in my well-shaded yard as a pleasant little vase-like grass. It does very well here in an area where other grasses will not grow; either because the soil has too much clay or the site receives too little sun. River Oats will tolerate low light conditions, but you don’t want to plant it in a deep dark corner. It likes light, but not direct sun, except for short periods of the day. Once established, it is remarkably drought tolerant. I have never had to rescue it in times of drought and it moves into times of plentiful rainfall without missing a beat. I don’t think this grass is particularly well-suited to sandy soils with little or no organic content. Mine grow under the shade of laurel oaks with limbs high off the ground so that sufficient light comes underneath. The ground has years of rotted oak leaves to add nutrient value. In nature, it occurs in moist deciduous forest understories – often in small light gaps or in areas where the canopy lets some light through.

If river oats is happy where it is located, it will spread to other areas that suit its fancy. Leave them or move them. The good thing about leaving them is that they have already decided they like the space; move at your own risk. There is one little piece of maintenance required, although this is not really required unless you treasure neatness. In winter, river oats will go dormant and the blooming stalks and leaf stalks will turn brown. Aesthetically, they should be cut off. A small tight rosette of leaves will remain through the winter months. Then, in spring, the rosette will expand, the grassy stalks will emerge, and the bloom stalks will return. I have never done it, but it seems like the flower stalks could be harvested for indoor use. I like them where they are and so I just enjoy the little plant.

OFFICERS

President: Bill Bilodeau 322-9695
Vice-President: Jim McGinity
Secretary: Melody Staunton
Treasurer: Jane Williams 447-7394
Chapter Rep: Deborah Chayet
dchayet@verizon.net
Past President: Cathy Quindiagan 327-7573

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Danie Cutler, Bruce Turley



Welcome New Members!
Judy Fisher, Marc Woernle

STANDING COMMITTEES

Conservation: open
Education-Displays: Marie Hughes 521-1261
--**Scholarships:** Cindy Peacock 787-4031
--**Special Events/Festivals:** Cindy Peacock
Field Trips: open
Membership: Cathy Quindiagan
Newsletter Editor: Craig Huegel 422-6583,
Huegelc55@aol.com
and Cathy Vogelsong 518-1026
Publicity: Janie Bridges 483-9162 or
janiebridges59@yahoo.com
Sales --Merchandise: Rose Taylor 821-8267
--**Plants:** Bruce Turley 595-2073

COORDINATORS

Budget: Jane Williams 447-7394
Hospitality: Mary Ann Beekman
Volunteer Coordinator: Laurie Bowen 709-1015
Web Master/Pinellas News: Jan Allyn 399-1022



P.O. Box 1661
Pinellas Park, FL 33780-1661

Pinellas Chapter Info Line:
(727) 544-7341

Pinellas Chapter web address:
<http://pinellas.fnpschapters.org>

FNPS Bulletin Board
<http://fnps.org/phpBB>



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