



BromeliAdvisory

November 2008 BSSF OFFICERS 2008

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Door Prize: Alan Herndon
Education: Nat DeLeon
Hospitality: Elaine Mills
Library: Juan Espinosa
Membership: Moyna Prince
Member Plant Sales: Antonio Arbelaez
Raffle: Peter & Clara Kouchalakos
Refreshments: Patty Gonzalez

What	Who
Sales Table	Antonio Arbelaez

NOVEMBER 4, 2008 , 7:30 PM

SPEAKER: Elton Leme, special friend of Karl Green, was scheduled to appear. But, the long distance travel prevented this. We will have special guest speaker to replace this honorable bromeliad enthusiast.

RAFFLE TABLE: Peter Kouchalakos

FOOD TABLE: Sandy Roth and Judy Pagliarulo

FYI FOR THE FUTURE:

ELTON LEME is the author of "Bromeliads in the Brazilian Wilderness", "Canistropsis", "Nidularium" and "Canistrum.." He has discovered more than 300 species of bromeliad.

As a high court justice, he has to make bromeliads an avid hobby – truly a passion beyond the common concept of weekend gardening warrior.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is again a special BromeliAdvisory. Included in the pages are many unique items which deserve more attention than usually delivered by the BSSF's kind and conscientious readers. They are:

1. An article by **Moyna Prince** about the longest sustaining member – **Nat DeLeon**. When you are done reading this brilliant piece, you can lean back, look to ceiling or sky above you, take a deep breath, and exhale with a smile. Great job by Moyna on an excellent topic.
 2. A most excellent piece outlining Nat's Bromeliad career by **Alan Herndon** – I lean back, breath out an ahhh . . . smile.
 3. A journal of many people's fond memories of **Nat DeLeon**
- ALL PHOTOS courtesy of **Michael Schmale** unless otherwise noted.

NAT DELEON – A HISTORY by Moyna Prince

Late in 2006, I sat down with **Nat DeLeon**, one of the founding members of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida. I was curious about the early years, when these exotic plants were first arriving from Latin America and sometimes from Europe. And I also wanted to hear about the beginnings of BSSF and the people who got it started.

Like most people in South Florida, Nat came from elsewhere. I asked him what brought him to Miami. He told me that he got out of the navy following WWII service and wanted to go to college, but all the colleges around Pennsylvania were already filled. "I sent letters all over the state and wasn't able to hook up with anything. Then I had a friend who played quarterback for our high school. He came down to UM to play quarterback, then transferred to West Point. He always raved about the climate in Miami. So in 1947 I sent a letter and got information about enrolling in the University of Miami and that's where I went. I didn't want any more of the northern cold and I thought going to a warmer climate would be just right for me. Even before I enrolled I knew this was the place I was going to stay after I graduated.

"After I graduated I took a job at the Miami Daily News in advertising but I wound up in circulation. Circulation meant having a lot of spare time. And I met a fellow who was doing a lawn business on the side so I went to work with him building up a clientele. After a year or so - he was not the working type - he intimidated to me that he was thinking of getting out. I said, 'I'll buy you out.' And I did. I quit the newspaper and decided to do this full time.

"I felt I needed to learn about these plants. I went to Fairchild Tropical Garden a couple of times a week. I also sent away for all kinds of catalogues. In those days some of the better nurseries had catalogues and sold a lot of things besides orchids. I did a lot of self-studying. There were no societies at that point.

"I felt I needed to learn about these plants. "

"I met my wife **Eileen** at UM when we were in a marketing class together. I think by that time I knew a fair amount and there was an opening at Parrot Jungle. It may have been a long courtship because at that time Parrot Jungle was at the end of the world and whenever I had a date with her I made sure my tires were in good shape, because it would have been a long walk to go anywhere else - probably in the dark.

"Parrot Jungle was at the point of expansion and they needed somebody and I dove into tropical plants, even more so because I didn't want anyone saying I got the job because I married the boss's daughter. There was plenty of room to make the grounds of Parrot Jungle as interesting as the birds. It was at the time when there was a boom in tourism and that put Parrot Jungle on the map. What they had there were mostly birds. The grounds were waiting to be worked on." I asked Nat how he got started in bromeliads. He replied that he wanted Parrot Jungle to have interesting plants. "Most of the other tourist attractions used annuals and I wanted something different. I wanted people to stop in their tracks and say, 'Gee, what's that? That's beautiful.' The first bromeliad I found was *Aechmea fasciata*, and it lasted so

long and was so easy to grow. I said 'Gee, I've got to get into this group of plants.'

Then I heard about **MULFORD FOSTER** and some of the other people who were collecting bromeliads. I used to get up at daybreak and drive up to Orlando and be with Mulford by 9 o'clock and listen to him talking for most of the day. Finally when it was starting to get dark I'd say I'd come up there to get some plants! He knew that the plants I'd get from him would be used in a landscape setting and that would help popularize bromeliads. I think we were the first to use bromeliads in the landscape. However, I couldn't get a lot of plants from him. He was in the process of moving from Orlando where he had a rather small place to the larger place he had in the country. But I would bring plants back. **JULIAN NALLY** grew *Vriesea mariae*, which at that time was hot, but he said he wouldn't sell more than a couple until he had 50 thousand. He wanted to grow *Vr. mariae* as a cut flower. He was interested in other bromeliads that I was able to buy. So Mulford's was the center. He was the guy who did all the hybridizing. Hardly anyone else I knew did hybridizing at that time, with the exception of Ralph Davis and myself.

"I think we were the first to use bromeliads in the landscape. "

Ralph came to the Jungle one time because he'd heard I was using bromeliads in the landscape, and we had a pretty good friendship. Ralph was more interested in staghorn ferns and crotons. But when he got the bromeliad bug, crotons took a back seat. He had a lot of oak trees up in North Miami and had enough room for his bromeliad benches. He and I started to do some joint ventures, importing from South America, mostly Brazil. We tried not to duplicate. If I did something, he would do something different. I would go up to his place at least once a month. We both started hybridizing. What I wanted to do was have masses of bromeliads. Not onesies and twosies. To do that it would be almost impossible unless you grew a lot of your own. Bromeliads were pretty scarce. Bob and Catherine Wilson's Fantastic Gardens nursery was only five minutes away and anything they had I got, within reason. But they still didn't want to sell in any quantity either."



A Nat Special: *Guzligulata* x Super Fortuna

Nat is famous for his hybrids and it took a farsighted person to realize what the future could hold for a commercial grower, with an attraction like Parrot Jungle requiring a constant supply of colorful, showy plants. Nat told me he spotted blooming XNeophytum Lymanii on a visit to Mulford Foster. Nat could see there was a wide variation in the colors, ranging from red to green and everything in between. But Mulford wouldn't sell those hybrids. However, he did part with an *Orthophytum navioides*, one of the parents of XNeophytum Lymanii. Driving home Nat was puzzling over what he could hybridize the *Orthophytum* with, and *Neoregelia carolinae* was the plant he came up with.

"It wasn't that long before the *Orthophytum* showed signs of coming into bloom and I had to find something that was also in bloom. Luckily RALPH DAVIS had several *Neo. carolinae* that were also coming into bloom and I told him what I wanted to do. He said 'Come on up. It's yours.' I brought some home and hybridized and got lots of plants and gave some to Ralph. Because of our partnership and because I got the carolinae from him I named Neophytum 'Ralph Davis' after him. I made Neophytum 'Gary Hendrix' too and several other Neophytum hybrids."

On a 1959 visit to Fantastic Gardens, the famous nursery run by Bob and Catherine Wilson, Nat encountered ALEX HAWKES who had just returned from a bromeliad society meeting in St. Petersburg. As the three men talked, they wondered if there was enough interest in the Miami area to form their own society.

Said Nat: "We each called some people and set up the first meeting at Fantastic Gardens. There probably weren't more than a dozen people at that first meeting but we started a society. We grew too big for meeting in each other's homes and started meeting in South Miami Savings and Loan." Alex Hawkes became the temporary chairman of the board and in 1960 Nat was named the first president, a position he also held in 1978-79 and 1986-87.

In 1970 the BSSF put on a show at Fairchild Tropical Garden. The Nov.-Dec. 1970 issue of *The Bromeliad Society Bulletin* describes it: "The entire auditorium was filled with mulch and arranged into islands illuminated by overhead spots. A thousand or more bromeliads were shown in the beds, including the hybrids of Nat DeLeon and a spectacular blooming *Vriesea* [now *Alcantarea*] *imperialis* lent them by Tom Mentelos of Fantastic Gardens." This show was followed by annual events at Fairchild which have always featured dozens of Nat's spectacular blooming and variegated *Vrieseas* and *Guzmanias*. Education was emphasized, with card tables set up in the show room, each featuring a different bromeliad genus.

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Nat had always been interested in palms, which to him denoted the tropics. He describes those early years:

"Whenever I thought about the tropics I thought about palms. Whenever I went to Fairchild, so I could speak intelligently to the people I was working for, I memorized the labels on the palms. I used to write different people. There were maybe three different nurserymen in Belgium I used to correspond with. One was interested in palm seeds and in return I wanted *Neo. carolinae* tricolor. Mulford Foster had said it would be a couple of years before he had any to sell."

He became acquainted with GEORGES DEMEYER, a well-known Belgian bromeliad grower. They sent seedlings back and forth while they were evaluated for commercial qualities depending on their different growing conditions. But the DeMeyers were strictly commercial, while Nat was looking for showy landscaping plants.

He also started corresponding with people in the tropics and the only way he could get their names was through the orchid journals. "I wrote to an orchid man in Cali, Colombia, and we corresponded and even traded certain plants. And then I thought, if I'm going to do a really nice job at Parrot Jungle, it would be nice if I could go into the jungle and see what it was all about. I asked the Colombian about meeting him and the two of us going on a collecting trip. I brought back some heliconias and other plants from Colombia. In some ways my first trip was a disaster, but it was a learning experience. I actually went on three collecting trips to Colombia. I learned that altitude was critical so I always went to the lower areas. I collected in Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador. I was more interested in *Guzmanias*, anything that looked really colorful. Parrot Jungle had plenty of shade and *Guzmanias* needed plenty of shade.



A Nat DeLeon special: *Guzconifera* x 'Fortuna' Hybrid

"By that time I'd moved from a small house in South Miami to Old Cutler Road, where I had an acre and a half. I did not have real facilities at Parrot Jungle but I was able to use my own place for hybridizing." Hardiness also had to be considered. Nat persuaded Parrot Jungle to build a couple of Quonset type shade houses for protection of ornamental but cold-tender plants - not only bromeliads. These would be displayed

in the grounds while they bloomed, pot and all, and returned to the protective huts when they finished flowering.

Nat made the acquaintance of California growers and swapped plants back and forth. He started acquiring orchids from FRED FUCHS, a Homestead orchid grower who was making frequent collecting trips to Latin America. Nat attached the orchids to tree limbs, and placed portable signs that said "Orchids [or bromeliads] in bloom" with an arrow pointing straight up.

By then it was obvious that many visitors went there because of the beautiful gardens. In recognition of his landscaping work, Parrot Jungle renamed the garden "Parrot Jungle and Gardens." I asked Nat about his involvement with the BSI. He told me: "I became a member of the BSI about the time I became interested in bromeliads. I guess the involvement had more to do with expanding my interest.

There were a number of growers in California, among them DAVID BARRY. He was very wealthy and would go over to Europe. He was interested in many plants, not only bromeliads, and it was another way of getting new things. We corresponded some. He was also interested in palms and cycads. I think my first trip to California was to accept the presidency of the Palm Society.

I was the fifth president of that society from 1964-1966, and David Barry was the second president. So I went out to California and spent a week or so there. That's when I met BILL PAYLEN and VICTORIA PADILLA. Slowly but surely people were finding out what was happening here. Don't forget, the BSI was almost all California at that time, but I joined because I was interested in the bromeliads. I became a director. Florida was becoming a big bromeliad-growing area. There was an upheaval and the BSI president was forced to resign, and the other directors asked me to be president. I was president just one term. There was a lot of controversy over shows and show schedules. There were more societies in Texas and New Orleans that were on the wane. That seems to be happening in Florida now. I think it's due to the changing of the times, with computers becoming more common and the mass information age. A lot of societies are having difficulties. I worry about these societies that are combining bromeliads with other plant groups."

"A lot of societies are having difficulties. I worry about these societies that are combining bromeliads with other plant groups."

Nat told me the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies was formed following a meeting with Carol Johnson, a nursery owner in central Florida. Carol was concerned about having accepted the 1980 World Conference, and getting enough involvement from other societies. Nat's position was that all societies needed to help each other. By then he felt the societies were getting a little rusty and needed ideas from other people and places.

At about this time, Nat started his famous nursery. He told me he started DELEON'S BROMELIADS in 1979 for his sons. "At first we were a retail and mail order nursery. Then we learned about chemicals to induce blooming, and tissue culture was just coming into being. Before that, we used to order plants from the BAK NURSERY in Belgium and they would send us the plants in flower, which we'd pot up and sell. Having a retail nursery and mail order business is not

the easiest thing, because we'd have people come in and spend an awful lot of time and not an awful lot of money. We knew who the big buyers were. For instance, when we got in *Aechmea* 'Samurai,' my sons got on the phone and had ready buyers. It still was a tough deal. Eileen and I spent a lot of time feeding our kids because they weren't making a lot of money. So when tissue culture and the chemicals to induce flowering came in, I talked my sons into going wholesale. We bought a five-acre nursery at the present site on 216th Street which is a main road and very accessible. We had a one-acre shade house to start with, which has expanded to 28 acres presently."

I asked Nat which of his hybrids is his favorite. He told me:

"One of my favorite bromeliads is *Vrieslandsia* 'Ultima.' Unfortunately it's not the best plant for Florida because it likes it cool. But I'm not sure I really have a favorite bromeliad. The most sold individual bromeliad would be *Aechmea fasciata*, and in general Guzmanias are probably the most important genus commercially. *Aec. fasciata* will probably always be the best seller because it has such a long-lasting inflorescence, and Guzmanias are important because they do well indoors. Part of the early problem was educating people in caring for bromeliads and not over-watering them."

Over the years Nat has seen a lot of changes for the bromeliad hobbyist. He pointed out that while there used to be more nurseries, they were more like backyard growers. Now we have the Home Depots and K-Marts, but unless you get to the store when the plants are first put out, you may buy something that's been neglected.

Finally, Nat said: "While the Journal has been the voice of bromeliads for so many years, I have to mention the everyday voice of bromeliads that has been available for some time now, and that is the Florida Council of Bromeliad Society's web site, <http://fcb.org/> MICHAEL ANDREAS and his wife KAREN have done a tremendous job. The web site covers just about every facet of bromeliads and includes the most up to date photos of hybrids made by bromeliad lovers from all over the world. It is truly a work of art!"

ED PRINCE DAY November 22, 2008

Mark your calendars. The society will go to Sunset High School on November , 2008 on or around 10 AM, to prepare the garden in Ed Prince's honor. A plaque has already been commissioned, made and paid for. Plants will be donated by members. Now, we need one thing from you: Sweat equity. Enlist yourselves for an afternoon which will deliver homage and hopefully eternal honor for Ed Prince at the school where his years of school-related work occurred. A sign up sheet will be at the next meeting.

A Brief History of Nat DeLeon in the Bromeliad World.

By Alan Herndon

Nat's interest in bromeliads began after he became Director of Horticulture at Parrot Jungle. In the early years, bromeliads were not easy to find in cultivation, so Nat traveled to different parts of the state and sent off for every nursery catalog containing exotic plants that he heard of. He also developed an extensive correspondence with collectors and growers from Europe and Latin America in his quest for new plants. Finding the commercially available supply inadequate to meet his needs for mass plantings at Parrot Jungle, he turned to hybridization and raising plants from seed early on.

In 1959, several bromeliad growers in Dade County decided to form a local society devoted to the study of bromeliads and to seek affiliation with the still young Bromeliad Society, Inc. (now Bromeliad Society International or BSI). Nat served as President of the Temporary Board and the first President of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida (BSSF) for the period May 1960- May 1961. Once BSSF was awarded affiliate status with BSI, Nat was made, as was customary at the time, an Honorary Vice President and Director of BSI.

In 1962, *Nidularium deleonii* was described by Lyman B. Smith (Bromeliad Society Bulletin 12(6): 104-105.) based on specimens collected by Nat in Colombia. In an accompanying article, Nat (pages 105-107) provided more information on the conditions encountered while collecting the plants. The plant was transferred to the genus *Ronnbergia* shortly thereafter. Twenty years later, a second plant from the same collecting trip was recognized as a distinct species and formally described by Harry Luther as *Ronnbergia neoregeloides* (Journal of the Bromeliad Society 33(1): .)

By 1964, BSSF had grown considerably, bolstered in part by a strong contingent from Broward County. When the size of the society threatened to overwhelm the meeting facilities, Nat encouraged the Broward folks to start their own society. He became a charter member and aided the young society through yearly programs and donations of plants to their sales.

At this early date, Nat's plants at Parrot Jungle and in his private collection were also drawing wide attention. Visits with Nat formed the basis of articles in the BSI journal in 1966, 1973 and 1978. In 1968, Nat's hybrid *Aechmea* 'David Barry' was featured on the cover of the journal (volume 18, number 6). The plant had not yet been named and was identified only by its hybrid formula. Two more Nat hybrids were featured on the back cover of the journal in 1970 (volume 20, number 6). Again, these were identified strictly by hybrid formulas.



Aechmea 'David Barry'
ramosa v. *festiva*? x
weilbachii f. *leodiensis*
Photo by Jay Thurrott

was to provide a support group for the Bromeliad Society of

In 1977, Nat was instrumental in forming the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies (FCBS). The immediate purpose of the council

Central Florida with the World Bromeliad Conference/30th Anniversary of BSI scheduled for Orlando in 1980. This also provided the impetus for BSSF to begin a series of annual shows that continues to this day (the BSSF staged shows before this, but I don't know that they were annual shows). In any case, the numbering system for shows in use today began in 1978. During this period, Nat also assumed the presidency of the BSSF for the second time (1979-1980) and was a consultant helping guide the development of the new Bromeliad Identification Center at Selby Botanical Gardens

One of the ventures of the FCBS was *Grande* magazine (4 issues published in 1978-79). In the first issue of *Grande*, a visit to Nat's private collection formed the basis for a feature article, and in the third issue, Nat, as president of FCBS, authored a major article on the need for 'responsible hybridizing'. This article (representing official FCBS policy), called for scrupulous record-keeping in hybridization programs and for discouraging the propagation of hybrids that do not represent some improvement on the parents. In furtherance of this policy, the FCBS adopted a rule not allowing unregistered hybrids to compete for major awards in shows by member societies. The article also called on growers (and particularly) sellers to make every effort to ensure that they use correct names on plants.

Nat was soon taking on a more prominent national role. He was elected president of the BSI at the 1982 board meeting and took office in 1983. The board meeting took place in conjunction with the World Bromeliad Conference at Corpus Christi. At that Conference, Nat also played a major role in organizing an auction to support the Bromeliad Identification Center at Selby. As the newly installed president, he was profiled in the first issue of the Journal of the Bromeliad Society for 1983.

In 1985, Nat became the Hybrid Registrar for the BSI.

From this position, he attempted to standardize the naming of bromeliad cultivars and hybrids. This was a long-standing project of Nat's. He brought up the issue in the *Grande* article mentioned above, as well as in an article introducing *Guzmania lingulata* 'Superb' (JBS 33(1): 21-22,29). Coincident with this



appointment as Hybrid Registrar, he published an article on the treatment of variegated plant names (JBS 35(1): 34-36.), pointing out how misleading it was to use 'latinized' names that gave an aura of taxonomic respectability to plants that arose in cultivation

With the responsibility for hosting a World Bromeliad Conference coming up in 1988, Nat again took the helm of the BSSF from 1986 and 1987. During that period he focused the society on producing a wildly successful show. His presidential messages in the *Advisory* were full of encouragement and practical suggestions for the society members involved in the show. This show, aside from being financially successful beyond

expectation, raised over \$10,000 for the still young Bromeliad Identification Center.

In more **recent years**, Nat has strongly supported the 'Evil Weevil' project, a project aimed at eradicating or controlling the population of a recently introduced beetle with an appetite for our native Florida *Tillandsia* species. He helped organize a project to collect seeds from native populations and grow the seedlings for eventual replanting in native environments.

With this history, it is not surprising that Nat has been repeatedly honored for his contributions. In 1996, he was inducted in the Florida Foliage Hall of Fame. In 2000, he was elected an Honorary Trustee of BSI and also Honorary Trustee of FCBS. FCBS honored Nat again in 2006, at the Bromeliad Extravaganza (hosted by BSSF) with a special award.

Thanks for the Memories

Nat is famous for his generosity to BSSF, of course. But that generosity was extended to members as well, Years ago, before a meeting, I was talking to Moyna Prince and Nat about my favorite bromeliads – pineapples. Specifically I had a spot by the mailbox where I wanted to place a large plant, but I was frustrated because only unfriendly spiny species seemed available. Sure enough, at our next meeting, Nat gave me a spineless pineapple. He said "Replant it in new medium and I think this will do the trick for you". Of course it did! Thanks, Nat.

Carl Bauer

My most memorable recollection of Nat was when I was a new, and very "green" bromeliad admirer. My knowledge was very limited and there was no question too trite or better yet downright stupid that Nat would not answer with clarity that I could understand, and not laugh at me while replying. He was always the gentleman, and I appreciate that to this day.

Judy Pagliarulo

Three people came to greet me when I nervously sat at my first meeting of the bromeliad society. First was Ed Prince who gave me a ticket for what he called the "door prize." Second was Moyna Prince who told me that she wanted to know what it is that she could do to get me to join. And, lastly, it was Nat DeLeon who asked why I wanted to join. To which I did not and still do not have any concrete response other than I want(ed) to. From there, it has been history. I have seen his plants for numerous years and taken a few home. In the paraphrased words of Churchill, you one day will think back to this relationship with someone of his stature and wonder how you lived in the same environs as someone like this bromeliad hall of famer.

Robert Meyer

When Ed and I joined BSSF, around 1980, we were warmly welcomed by several members of the society - Dean Fairchild, the Steinmetzes, Mike and Jane Keys (who held orientation meetings for new members), Bob Work and a man whose name we already recognized - Nat DeLeon. All of these folks volunteered years of work and knowledge to our society. Sadly, most of them have moved, passed away or are

unable to attend meetings. But our own Nat DeLeon continues to attend whenever he can, patiently sharing his knowledge with the most inexperienced growers and providing inspiration to all with his own awesome hybrids. His enthusiasm and dedication to the world of Bromeliaceae is an example for all members, and I for one am grateful for all I've learned from him over the past 28 years.

Moyna Prince

My fondest memory of Nat goes back to the late 90's when Nat invited me to the nursery to give me some bromeliads. Needless to say I was as happy as a kid in a candy store. I had read Baensch's book "Blooming Bromeliads" and knew about some of his hybrids and had fallen in love with *Nidumea* Superstar cv. Midnight. I was given a copy of that plant as well as some coveted species including *Aechmea tessmannii* and many others. I think about that day frequently and will always remember it as if it were yesterday.

Karl Green

FACTOIDS on NAT DeLEON

Nat is a member of the "Save Florida's Native Bromeliads Project Committee" which is instrumental in the evil weevil project.

Nominee of the Wally Berg Award in 2002.

Nat was a member of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies' Grants Committee for numerous years.

Nat introduced *Neoreglia* "Fireball" in the early 1960's.

Nat's best named plant: *Aechmea* hybrid "Eileen"

Patent number: PP7833

Filing date: Jun 22, 1990

Issue date: Mar 17, 1992

A new and distinct *Aechmea* hybrid cultivar obtained by crossing (*Aechmea Fasciata* x



Aechmea serrata) with *Aechmea serrata*, substantially as herein shown and described, characterized as to novelty by the unique combination of the spineless habit of the leaves, and a large, upright, heavily-branched inflorescence bright rose in color, which stays in color for several months.

Photo by: Doug Upton