

Coushatta

Camellia



September 2008 Newsletter

P.O. Box 1655, Conroe, TX 77305

Society

The weather is getting cooler, but our friendships stay warm! We hope that you and yours weathered the storms of Hurricane Ike with little in the way of damage, and are well on the way to recovery.

Coushatta Camellia Society, and the camellia world, lost a wonderful friend last spring. Many thanks to Greg Davis for writing the following article about this inspiring man and to Dr. Pat's daughter Jane for sharing her memories.

The Genteel Gardener From Coldspring, Texas

Dr. Pat McMurrey died on his 85th birthday, March 26, 2008. He died from complications from the recurrence of prostate cancer that had been diagnosed and properly treated with radiation more than 15 years ago.

Pat retired from the medical field in 1981. He and his artist wife Eva moved from Baytown to his inherited acreage near Coldspring. He built his own house and became an exacting and enthusiastic gardener. He kept meticulous notes on all plantings, the dates, costs, fertilizers, and weather conditions. He soon had a large pecan orchard, a vineyard of 40 or more scuppernong grapes (muscadines in East Texas) and the best vegetable garden in the county. He was well recognized as an expert in camellias, daylilies, and cream peas.

Pat was born in Coldspring, Texas, the youngest of six, on March 26, 1923. He grew up in a large home—his father was a prominent attorney who served several terms as County Judge of San Jacinto County.

Pat had three brothers and two sisters. One of the sisters died in childhood before he was born. The other died several years ago at age 100. One brother died several years ago in his nineties. Another brother lives in a retirement home in Dallas.



continued page 3 - see "Genteel Gardener"

Upcoming Events

October 7 October meeting
6:30 p.m. - social
7:00 p.m. - program
First Christian Church Parlor
3500 N Loop 336 W, Conroe

Sign up to bring cookies to upcoming meetings - Meg Mendek will have the hospitality sign-up sheet.

Sign up to help at the fall plant sale.

November 4 November meeting
6:30 p.m. - social
7:00 p.m. - program
First Christian Church Parlor
3500 N Loop 336 W, Conroe

November 8... Houston Camellia Show
Greg Davis needs your flowers
and your help (judges and clerks).
Support the Houston Camellia Show!

November 15 Fall Plant Sale
Kroger on the North Loop 336



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Happy Birthday!

September

Doris Allwright
Buffalo Allwright

Lois Boudreaux

Bill McCranor

Randall McDaniel

Meg Mendeck

Debra Stallings

Emmalee Striebeck



October

W. B. Knox

Tena Koch

Ruby McConnell

Claire Surles



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Genteel Gardener - continued from front

The third brother was killed in the Pacific in WWII. Pat never forgave the Japanese and steadfastly refused to buy a Japanese car. Pat's mother died when he was 15.

After graduating from Coldspring High School, one of 13 graduates, Pat attended Lee Junior College in Baytown. While in Baytown he met his future wife, Eva Massey and they married before Pat finished Med School. After several semesters at the University of Texas he was accepted in Baylor Medical School in Houston and graduated in 1948. His internship was served in St. Louis. They returned to Baytown where Pat was a popular family physician.

Shortly after retiring to his Coldspring acreage, Pat was introduced to camellias by his physician friend Dr. Emil Carroll. Pat and Eva were fascinated by the large, almost perfect camellia-reticulatas. The McMurrey's soon joined the camellia social group and enjoyed going to the Gulf Coast Camellia Society meetings in Mobile in August of each year. Another feature of the Mobile trip was the opportunity for buying the newest camellia varieties and the best camellia plants in Mobile and Lucedale. Pat built a large greenhouse for his camellias and they soon were going to five or six camellia shows each year. Eva was the competitive driving force, and they soon were competing with the best camellia exhibitors. Pat and Eva both became Camellia Judges—Pat was the Chairman of Judges for the Conroe Camellia Show for many years.

An interesting development in the camellia circuit was the widespread use of a contaminated chemical—DuPont's Benlate—which killed many nursery plants from Florida to Texas. Dupont was slow to confess to the problem and was reluctant to pay for damages. They then tried to settle with small growers with token payments but Pat, with his meticulous records, held out for full coverage. A "camellia expert" from LSU was sent to examine the McMurrey camellias and his report indicated that "poor growing practices may have been responsible for most of the plant kill". This really upset Pat and he filed a law suit—which he eventually won.

Pat's lovely artistic wife died in the fall of 2002 and this loss greatly affected Pat. He dropped out of most activities for several years. However, just in the last year or two, Pat had partially recovered from Eva's death. He had renewed interest in camellias and promised to become active again.

He was elected Chairman of the local cemetery association and was active in the Methodist Church. He recently purchased a new garden tractor and was planning on his best ever garden this year.

Pat is survived by his only son David, David's wife Phoebe, and their two children, Patrick and Jane. David is a college professor in Austin. Phoebe is a RN, MSN, CHCE nurse. Patrick just graduated from Vanderbilt with a music degree and will teach in Austin this fall. He plans to marry Arielle Swinney of Nashville in August. Jane just completed her freshman year at George Washington University in D.C. and is in their Elliot School of International Affairs.

Jane has written several of her favorite memories of Grandfather Pat:

"Grandfather always had a random assortment of dogs and cats on his property. Without asking my parents, he sold me and my brother Patrick our first dog for one dollar".

"We used to love to camp out at Grandfather's. We used to call the coyotes—which basically consisted of yelling in the dark. One time, when I was about ten, after making our usual coyote calls, the Police showed up. Apparently someone had mistaken our attempts at animal calls for child abuse and reported us. After everything was settled and the officer was leaving, Grandfather told him to take me with him".

"When my brother and I were very young we used to ride in a trailer attached to the back of one of Grandfather's four-wheelers. One time the trailer-hitch mal-functioned and Patrick and I flew forward into the dirt face first. Instead of asking if we were hurt, Grandfather examined the dirt road and told us we had to pay for the small indentions our chins had made in the road".

"After Grandfather mastered the computer, he loved to email me. We would email several times daily. My favorite ongoing conversation was our plot to take over the world together. We decided we were going to publish a book about Grandfather's experiences in hiring the locals to work in his gardens. This was to make us rich".

We will all greatly miss this genteel gardener from Coldspring. He is buried next to Eva in the family plot in the Oakwood Cemetery in Coldspring. Per Pat's instructions, he is buried in a plain, pine coffin.

by Gregory E. Davis

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Coushatta Camellia Society Newsletter

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Editor &

Writer Judy Weidner

PLANT SALE 2008

Dennis Bilyeu

We plan on having the public plant sale on November 15 and will confirm this when we obtain permission from Kroger. We will be asking for volunteers to help with this plant sale.

Dick Eidem and I will be bringing plants to the October meeting for CCS members that placed orders with Mark Crawford (Georgia).

People that placed orders and need to pick up their plants at the meeting are: Jack Dyer, Victor Treat, Ruby McConnell, Tommy Weeks, Morris Waller, Jenny Marcotti, and Greg Davis.

We were not able to obtain all the plants ordered but did bring back, from Mobile, some other varieties for the members to consider/purchase. These plants will cost \$25 each at the meeting. These same plants will be \$30 at the public plant sale in November. Members should plan on getting their plants at the meeting to save \$5 and have the pick of the better plants. We will have an excellent selection of varieties that are very hard to find in Texas, and the astute Camellia grower will want just about every one of these

Fall Plant Sale November 15!

Saturday, November 15, is the date to attend the fall plant sale! Plant Sale Chairmen Dennis Bilyeu and Dick Eidem are hard at work making arrangements. The site of the sale will remain the Kroger on the North Loop 336. Dennis and Dick will have a sign-up sheet at the October meeting, for volunteers to offer to help.

varieties. Some of the extra varieties we will have for sale are: Bobby Fain V, Carter's Sunburst, Gunsmoke V, Lady Laura, Little Babe V, Margarett Davis, Charlene, Charlene V, Seafoam, Royal Velvet, R.L. Wheeler V, Magic City, Debutant, and Mathotiana Supreme.

Members interested in these plants should come to the meeting early for the members plant sale.

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