



Friends of Honolulu Botanical Gardens

# The Bodhi Leaf

FALL 2013

180 N. Vineyard Boulevard • Honolulu, Hawaii 96817 • Phone 808-537-1708

## The Irreplaceable Paul Weissich



Photo: Dana Anne Yee, FASLA

***More than anyone else currently volunteering for the Friends of Honolulu Botanical Gardens, Paul Weissich will leave his valuable, consistent and thoughtful work as a legacy to the Islands. Paul is moving to California soon to be closer to his family, but plans to keep in touch with the Friends and visit us on occasions. Paul was asked to write his memories of his long association with the Botanical Gardens, and these are events he best remembers.***

**1957.** That was a pivotal year in my life. One morning I was summoned to the office of the Superintendent of Parks. I was, at the time Deputy Director of Parks Planning and Construction. I was advised that Dr. Harold Lyon had passed away the night before but had made prior arrangements with the Parks Board to have me become Director of Foster Garden. I was dumbfounded but not speechless. Dr. Lyon, a long-time friend of Mary Foster until her death in 1930, had convinced her to donate her property and garden to the City. Lyon was involved with the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association (HSPA) specifically for introducing and growing trees that would assist in reforesting eroded areas of the watershed. Sugar depended on a reliable water supply. HSPA had leased the lower portion of her property as a forestry nursery. He had, with Mary Foster's approval, added many new species to her garden. It was Dr. Lyon, a mentor, who planted the idea of multiple gardens in environmentally differing situations, something readily done due to O`ahu's climate. Soon we added Koko Crater to our garden system. Hot and dry. Ho`omaluhia is lowland rainforest, while the Wahiawa Garden provides an upland, cool climate.

*continued (on page 4)*

# President's Message

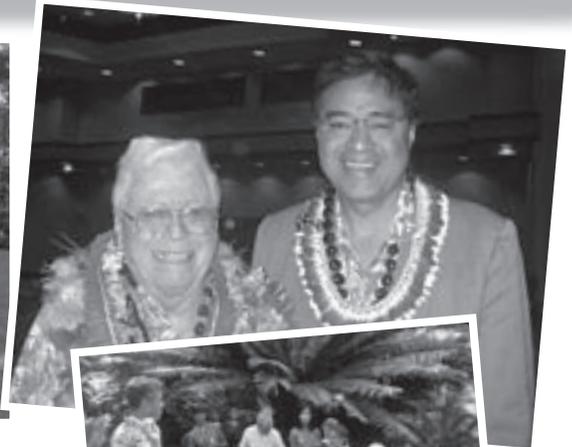
## Aloha Paul

Of all the things I dread, "good byes" are the worst. After 50 years with the Friends, our founder Paul Weissich is leaving us. We all knew this would happen someday, but most of us, I believe, hoped to leave first and have difficulty imagining the Friends without him. In my military career where a 3-year tour was the norm, I watched many good leaders leave as part of the normal career-progression system. One, in his "good bye" speech, reassured his followers that his departure was nothing to be concerned about because nobody is "indispensable". He then gave us a way to test if a leader was indispensable. He said: "Have him put his finger in a glass of water and pull it out. If a hole remains where his finger was, he is indispensable." Well, as a young man, that worked for me, but it doesn't anymore.

Great leaders are precious. In my short life (I am only 76), I have only worked with a few. Paul is one of them. He made work fun. He inspired and brought out the best in people. He was a volunteer machine. When he asked you to do something, you wanted to say "yes." We will miss him. We will survive, but things will never be the same. We wish him well. If he ever puts his finger in a glass of water, I want to be there when he pulls it out.

**Bill Follmer, President**

*Friends of Honolulu Botanical Gardens*



*"friends and memories on my garden path"*



# From the Director's Desk

Did you get the chance to see Foster Botanical Garden's spectacular blooming "corpse plant" this year or last year?

For just a short couple of days in mid-May of 2012, and in the first week of May this year, this remarkable botanical wonder was in bloom. The corpse or carrion plant's claim to fame is that it produces the largest unbranched inflorescence in the world, and its bloom exudes an overwhelming smell of decomposing meat!

Native to the rainforests of Sumatra, Indonesia, the *Amorphophallus titanum* can grow to a height of 10 feet. A single leaf grows from an underground storage organ which looks somewhat like a flattened potato. When enough energy is stored, every 3 to 5 years, a bloom or "flower" begins to develop.

What looks like a single flower is actually a complex reproductive unit. A single, deep maroon spathe (which looks like a giant petal) encloses a central column called a spadix. The spadix of Foster Botanical Garden's 2012 flowering corpse plant was chartreuse in color; this year's plant produced a maroon colored spadix.

Near the bottom of the spadix are hundreds of tiny female and male flowers. The female flowers, which are at the bottom of the column, open on the first evening/night that the spathe is open. The smell is pungent and fetid, luring dozens of flies and carrion beetles expecting a delicious meal of rotting flesh.

The next evening/night, the male flowers, which are above the females on the column, open to shed pollen. It's too late, because by this time, the female flowers have already opened and closed.

As you might guess, in nature, there has to be two separate plants – one with male flowers open, and the other with female flowers open – on the same night! - for pollination and fertilization to be successful. No wonder this plant is endangered in the wild! If nature is unsuccessful, pollen must be saved and stored, and pollination completed by hand to produce seeds and new plants.

At the Honolulu Botanical Garden, we are grateful to Mr. Louis Ricciardiello, who generously donated seven corpse plants to augment our inventory. We're hoping for a continuous succession of blooms over the coming years.

Keep your schedules flexible around each May – you just might find out what the buzz is about by seeing and catching a whiff of our stinky botanical wonder!

**Winnie Singeo, Director**

*Honolulu Botanical Gardens*



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*Irreplaceable (from page 1)*

**Back to 1957:** I immediately assessed operational needs. The old manure shed was cleaned up, painted, termite treated and became my office. A long piece of plywood on two recycled file cabinets became a desk. I found an old typewriter. I was sure it was on loan from the Smithsonian. A part-time 'secretary' was assigned to me. Shortly thereafter I met Dr. Joseph Rock. I was told he was in the garden and quickly located him and introduced myself. We got along fine. After a half an hour he, in his dignified manner, told me that I could call him "Pohaku" (Hawaiian for rock). In an equally dignified manner I told him he could call me "Paul". We became fast friends for the balance of his life. He appointed me Executor of his Estate. He died in December 1962. His influence on me is indefinable. He opened my eyes to a world of plants, his knowledge and love of the native Hawaiian flora was extensive, his energy was inexhaustible. He was another giant in my life.

**In 1960** I was able to make a three month world tour of major botanic gardens: Kew, Calcutta, Singapore, Bogor among the largest. It was an eye-opener and spurred activity toward my goal of the multiple garden sites. In 1961 the Friends of Foster Garden was founded, later to become Friends of Honolulu Botanical Gardens. Staff and Friends formed a close, coordinated and effective task force. A highly successful education program was started providing a wide range of plant related activities to the public: classes, demonstrations, hikes, neighbor island field trips, tours to Europe, New Zealand and the Galapagos; eight widely acclaimed Flora Pacifica exhibits were produced. Friends funded staff educational travel, bought reference books for the library, began computerization of records, supported extensive plant introduction from the world's tropics and produced the first garden inventory since Dr. Rock's 1908 inventory of Mary Foster's garden which listed 145 species.

During all the 33 years covered by my tenure it was only through the close, consistent, friendly cooperation between Director and Friends that produced the remarkable garden system we are justifiably proud to present to the community and its visitors. It's been an exciting life. I will soon depart for Vacaville, California where I shall take an apartment very close to family in a 'Retirement Residence'. I carry with me great aloha for the many, many people in my career who have sustained me, volunteered for projects and programs, for a wonderful, dedicated staff, to those who made me laugh. A hui hou – Paul

