

OBITUARY

KENNETH (KEN) C. FOSTER

Ken Foster, 73, died Friday morning December 13th, 2002, at St. Francis Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawai'i, after a lengthy battle with cancer and heart problems.

Ken, who was born in Massachusetts, had been very active within the IPS, as well as with local chapters in Southern California, Florida and Hawai'i for most of his adult life. His IPS involvement included two years as President in the 1970s. Ken and Don Hodel made a number of collecting trips in the late 1970s, primarily to islands in the southwest Pacific. Thanks to their efforts we now have many unusual and mature palms from Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and other islands here in Hawai'i. For the last twelve years or so, Ken lived on the island of Hawai'i. He was a very active member of Hawai'i Island Palm Society (HIPS) and served as Vice President from 1999 to 2001. His knowledge about palms was extensive, and he was often asked to act as guide on various garden tours.

I first met Ken in 1994 on one of my visits to the Big Island of Hawai'i. At the time I lived in Poway, California, and was planning to move to the Hilo side of the Big Island. Ken, and his wife, Ruth, lived in Kalapana, about a half mile away from the Pacific Ocean. Ken had an incredible collection of about 800, mostly unusual, palms in containers up to 25 gallon size. He was meticulously taking care of his collection in anticipation of being able to buy a couple of acres at a higher elevation, and plant them. My wife, Karolyn, and I made the move to Hawai'i in late 1995, and settled in Leilani Estates, about 6 miles from Kalapana, around the 750 foot elevation. Shortly after we had finished building our house, Ken and Ruth bought a house on two heavily wooded acres, also in Leilani Estates. Ken was thrilled at the prospect of finally being able to put his collection in the ground. We now lived about a mile apart, and I had the opportunity to talk palms with Ken several times a week.

A few years later, Ken underwent heart surgery. Unfortunately, for all practical purposes, this also meant an end to his palm planting days. He was able to continue with his seed business – collecting, cleaning and selling palms seeds – and this kept him active, despite his health problems. In 2001, however, he accepted his limitations, and he and Ruth decided to sell the property. Jerry and Cindy Andersen from San Clemente, California, bought the property, and the fact that another “palm person” bought it was a source of great satisfaction to Ken.

Because of Ken's increasingly frail health, he spent close to a year in Houston, Texas, where he was close to his son, Will, and had access to excellent medical facilities at the Veterans Administration hospital. He was determined to return to Hawai'i, however, and came back in September 2002. His intention was to live on the island of O'ahu, in order to be close to Tripler Army Hospital, but he also visited the island of Hawai'i a few times in September and October 2002. I flew over from Hilo to Honolulu on November 15th and spent half a day with Ken. By sheer coincidence, he had been released from the hospital the day before, so we were able to drive around to a couple of his favorite places. Ken had lost a lot of weight, and was very weak, but certainly hadn't lost his interest in palms. He commented on a number of palms we saw, including some that had mature fruit, that was obviously just going to fall to the ground and go to waste. In Ken's eyes, this was the ultimate form of waste! Within a week of my trip over there, he was back in the hospital, and his condition quickly deteriorated to the point that he couldn't even speak on the telephone. Four weeks after I saw him, he quietly passed away.

Ken's love and enthusiasm for, knowledge of, and dedication to palms was unique and he will be truly missed by all those who were fortunate to know him and spend time with him.

BO-GÖRAN LUNDKVIST
Hawai'i

Editors' Note: A remembrance of Ken Foster by Don Hodel will appear in the next issue of PALMS.