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GT in Brief

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Industry Mourns Horticulturist Dr. Marc Cathey

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Internationally renowned horticulturist Dr. Marc Cathey, whose career spanned more than half a century, died October 8, 2008, at the age of 79 following a long struggle with Parkinson's disease. His influence spanned all of horticulture—from plant breeders and growers who benefit from his research to the millions of beginning to expert gardeners who turn to the American Horticultural Society's resources for gardening advice to the millions who visit the U.S. National Arboretum. He was an author and speaker, a frequent guest on national television shows and hosted a radio show for many years. He received numerous awards and honors from a broad spectrum of U.S. and international horticultural and floricultural groups.

Dr. Cathey, who received his bachelor's degree in floriculture from North Carolina State University and his master's and doctorate in horticulture from Cornell University in the mid-1950s, became a research horticulturist at the USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Maryland, in 1956. While there, Dr. Cathey's research focused on light and plant growth regulators. His work resulted in direct applications for the horticultural industry, producing products and "roadmaps" that helped growers schedule crops to bloom and be saleable for specific times.

During his term as director of the U.S. National Arboretum, starting in 1981, his notable accomplishments included the installation of the National Capital Columns in 1990, and the publication of the current version of the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, released in 1990.

Dr. Cathey's involvement with the American Horticultural Society began in 1959. He sat on the AHS Board for 18 years and was also president of the organization twice, from 1974 to 1978, and 1993 to 1997. After his second term, he stayed on as AHS president emeritus until 2005. While at AHS, Dr. Cathey contributed to American horticulture in many ways, including serving as editor-in-chief of the second edition of The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants, published in 2004. He also conceived and developed the AHS Plant Heat Zone Map, published in 1997, which helps gardeners select plants based on their heat tolerance. Always ahead of his time, he anticipated the current "green" trend by introducing the AHS SmartGarden program, which focuses on earth-friendly gardening, in 2000.

According to Dr. Marvin Miller, market research manager for Ball Horticultural Company, West Chicago, Illinois, Marc knew how to make "discovery" more interesting so that it would attract the casual observer to seek more knowledge

about the subject, often creating a horticultural convert in the process. "Marc was both a personal and a professional friend," Marvin says. "He was always connected with the industry, something quite rare for a USDA scientist. Marc knew who to call about an issue, knew the movers and shakers who could help get something done, and clearly understood the politics of the industry. As his career progressed, he built on that background to help the industry grow, to help inspire young people to get involved with horticulture, and to help all of us be the best we could be. He will truly be missed."

Dr. Cathey is survived by his wife, Mary, two children and four grandchildren. At the request of his family, memorials in Dr. Cathey's honor may be sent to the American Horticultural Society, 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308, as well as the Davidson College Presbyterian Church, or the Residence Assistance Fund at the Pines of Davidson.

Editor's Note: Look for a tribute to Dr. Cathey in the December 2008 issue of GrowerTalks.