GROWERTALKS

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In Memoriam: Peter Orum

Chris Beytes

"Life is not always easy, but it is always interesting."

That's a quote from highly regarded and much-loved horticulturist Peter Orum, founder of Midwest Groundcovers in St. Charles, Illinois, who passed away October 17 at home surrounded by friends and family after a four-month battle with a rare form of lymphoma. He was 82.

Peter was born in 1941 in Søborg, a suburb of Copenhagen, Denmark. He spent his early days doing chores in his father's small nursery and working for a neighboring farm, so horticulture was in his blood. Following grade 8, Peter entered a horticulture apprenticeship program, then went on to study at Vilvorde Horticulture School.

After a stint in the Danish army, in 1965 he boarded a ship and sailed to the U.S. to gain work experience at D. Hill Nursery in Dundee, Illinois, honing his growing skills. Soon, with his new wife, Irma, they founded Midwest Groundcovers and later Midwest Trading.

Peter was extremely active in the industry and served in association leadership at the state and national levels, and his awards, recognition and commendations from these groups are numerous.

During the pandemic, Peter determined that he would write his memoirs and in 2022, he published "People, Plants & Politics." In it, he discusses the many people who influenced him and whose lives he touched, the plants that have formed the very foundation of his career in horticulture, and the politics that inspired him to work for the legislative reforms he so strongly believed in.

Said Peter of the book, "It has been an interesting journey through life and now for a second time through this book. The journey has brought me unbelievable joy and heartbreaking sadness, and everything in between … I came from very little in the country Denmark that I loved, to a country, the USA, that gave me tremendous opportunity and that I came to love for its freedom to speak and to do things. Neither is perfect and neither are we." **GT**