

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Professor Paul Thomas

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Floriculture professor Paul Thomas of the University of Georgia passed away suddenly on Saturday, September 14. He was 65. At UGA, Paul taught greenhouse management, horticultural business practices and interiorscaping classes. He also served as the State Extension Specialist in floriculture.

Even sadder than Paul's untimely death is the fact that he had retired from UGA just two weeks before and had taken a new job with the American Floral Endowment (AFE) to promote its internship programs. At the time of his death, he was in Delaware doing what he loved most: visiting former students and greenhouses.

Wrote Professor Marc van Iersel of UGA in a letter to Paul's friends and colleagues, "Paul was a fierce advocate for his students and placed many of them in greenhouses around the country. He was extremely passionate about working with students and made a tremendous impact on the floriculture industry. We will all miss him, but no one will miss him more than his wife, Toni, and his two sons, the youngest of whom just got married."

Debi Chedester, executive director of AFE, wrote that Paul had been engaged by them to help out with promoting AFE's Vic & Margaret Ball Internship program and AFE's scholarships:

"Paul has been a great supporter of AFE's programs for many years and has sent dozens of students through AFE's programs. He helped create the current internship videos we use today that encourage participation by students and the industry.

"Paul volunteered to serve as an AFE Ambassador and had a half dozen visits scheduled between now and the end of the year to talk with other faculty members and speak in front of hort clubs on the east coast. He was such a great educator and had a passion for this industry that was infectious. He loved AFE and spent his entire career promoting the floral industry. He was an amazing person and his presence will be missed by so many."

The University of Georgia Horticulture Department has set up a scholarship in Paul's name, with donations going to providing scholarships to students interested in a career in floriculture, and a memorial tribute has been established with the American Floral Endowment. **GT**