

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Glenn Goldsmith

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Glenn Goldsmith, iconic plant breeder and founder of Goldsmith Seeds, passed away December 18 in Hawaii, where he had resided for many years. He was 93.

Glenn was apparently born to breed flowers. He told an interviewer in 1986 that he was crossbreeding gladiolas at age 9. He started Goldsmith Seeds in Gilroy, California, in 1962, after stints with Denholm Seeds and PanAmerican Seed. By 1967 his breeding work was such that he invited seed company sales reps out to Gilroy to see his new varieties compared to the competition. They came ... and slipped out to a few other neighboring seed companies while out there ... and the California Pack Trials was born.

Over its 46 years as a family business (three of Glenn's four sons—Joel, Richard and Jim—were all in management; eldest son Bill went into radio), Goldsmith Seeds was responsible for 20 All-America Selections winners, starting with Bright Butterflies Snapdragon in 1966. You'll also recognize Janie Marigold (1980) and Fantasy Petunia (1996).

And they were innovative in more than just plant breeding—in 1992, Goldsmith became the first California agricultural firm to provide on-site, company-paid child care. By the '90s, Goldsmith was a multinational company with operations in the U.S., Europe, Central America and Africa.

It was the Ralstonia outbreak of 2003 that made the Goldsmith family aware of the risky nature of such a business and that led to their decision in 2008 to sell the family business to Syngenta for a reported \$74 million. By then, Glenn and his wife, Jane, had retired to the island of Kauai, although he would still make appearances at Pack Trials (now CAST, the California Spring Trials).

Thoughts on Glenn

The passing of Glenn Goldsmith made an impact on folks. Here are a few excerpts from emails we've received. This first one is from Jeff Warschauer of Prospiant (formerly Nexus Greenhouses):

"Many, many years ago, my wife, Sharon, and I went to Kauai for a vacation. Sometime during the research for hotels and activities, I had a call from Joel [Goldsmith, Glenn's son] regarding the greenhouse projects we were doing in Guatemala and Gilroy. Probably in mentioning our trip, Joel told me that Glenn was on the board of the local botanical garden, and that they may need a greenhouse. He told me to look up his dad and shared his contact information.

"Well, almost immediately, Glenn has a meeting arranged with the botanical garden manager, plus a full tour of the Gardens. And Glenn had arranged for me to make a presentation to the Board of the Garden! You are correct: Glenn

was a big man, and his legacy is bigger than life!

“During a trip to the Goldsmith farm in Guatemala it was amazing—the presence of Glenn was everywhere. The employees adored him for all the wonderful things he did for his farm family. He was their saint.

“For me, too ... a young man visiting Hawaii, in the presence of Mr. Goldsmith, whose hand carried me into the botanical garden, supporting my efforts and being sure the garden had the facts. He truly loved what he did and helped so many of us along the horticulture paths we were on. Prayers to the Goldsmith family.”

From Dr. Marvin Miller, market research manager for Ball Horticultural Company:

“The story I remember about Glenn (is) from a video in which he was talking about breeding. Glenn noted that when they were trying to find snapdragons suitable for bedding, the team kept looking for dwarfer and dwarfer selections, discarding all the others as being too tall. He was talking about keeping your options open (which is similar to Anna’s oft-repeated comment, ‘For every trend, there’s a counter-trend’). Anyway, Glenn said that rather than discarding the taller varieties, perhaps the smart breeder looks for opportunities to take these taller selections and make a cut flower series with them. It was just a matter-of-fact comment that reiterated his outside-the-box way of thinking.”

Richard Criley, Emeritus Professor of Horticulture at the University of Hawaii, recalled his encounters while still a grad student with not one, but three industry titans: Glenn Goldsmith, Paul Ecke Sr. and Paul Ecke Jr.:

“I was a grad student under Tony Kofranek at UCLA in the mid-1960s and took in the field trips with his floriculture class. One was up to the Gilroy area where we met Glenn Goldsmith, who proudly showed off his brand-new butterfly snapdragon to us.

“Another was to Encinitas where we got to meet Paul Sr. and Paul Jr. Paul Jr. showed off his new C-1 poinsettia and knocked a plant out of its pot to show the strong root system. He was very proud of the strength and vigor of that series. (Somewhere I still must have a 35 mm slide of Paul Jr. holding up that poinsettia root ball.) When I landed my job here in Hawaii, I grew some C-1s to about 4 ft. tall with 15-in. diameter bracts.

“Coincidentally, I was interviewed on Hawaii’s Public Radio channel a week ago about poinsettias and got to tell the tale of the Ecke’s move from the Hollywood Hills where they grew poinsettias for cut flower use to San Diego and the conversion over to the potted plant market. There’s still a Poinsettia Lane in the Hollywood area. Since there are some poinsettias in our Hawaii residential landscapes, I was asked about them, and was able to say that they are descended from the cut flower types that grew well outside in California.” **GT**