



W N C O S

Western North Carolina Orchid Society

In the News

for December, 2011

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For more information, please visit our website

www.wncos.org

The President's Corner

By Graham Ramsey



Greetings All,

Boy, do we have a great society, which includes super knowledgeable members like Marc Burchette. From your feedback I know you enjoyed Marc's November program on *Catasetums* as much as I did. How many of you are ready to add some to your collection? Thanks again to Marc for a wonderful program.

Speaking of inspiring programs, Brett has a great 2012 lineup in progress, so keep checking www.wncos.org for regular updates. If you haven't visited our website lately, please do. It is chockfull of good stuff, like the year's past newsletters, photos, helpful links, and more. If there is something you don't find, and would like to see it, let us know. Another great source of information is the American Orchid Society website, www.aos.org. It can be a challenge to navigate, but everything orchid can be found there.

I could go on about what a successful year we have had, but instead, let's talk Party. **The Annual WNCOS Holiday Social** will be held on **December 11th, at 12 noon**. This year, Leslie and I will host the event at our cabin in Weaverville (see following page for directions). Please join us for an afternoon of fun, friends, hanging out in the greenhouse and great eats. This is a cover dish event, so bring your favorite ready-to-serve dish. We will supply non-alcoholic beverages and one of our special members has promised to bring wine to share. Otherwise, feel free to bring your own preferred beverage of choice.

And as if that was not enough, there will be great gifts and door prizes for all members. Get your calendar out and mark **December 11th, at 12:00pm**. We are looking forward to a great holiday event.

Cheers,

Graham Ramsey

WNCOS

Annual Holiday Social!!



Directions to Graham and Leslie's

Take Highway 19/23 West toward Weaverville. Take New Stock exit. At the end of the ramp turn right. At the light turn left (Ingles should now be on your right). At the next light turn right onto Reems Creek Road. Go approximately 7 miles until the road ends (you will see a stone church on the right). Turn left (Maney Branch) and cross the short bridge. Turn right immediately after the bridge onto Blackberry Inn Road. Follow this paved road for approximately 2 miles until it turns to dirt. Follow the dirt road one mile until the end. Our driveway is clearly marked 531 on the right.

Sunday December 11th, at 12 Noon

Graham Ramsey and Leslie Keller's Cabin

Meet The Members

by Leslie Ann Keller

Ralph Coffey



Orchidist, Master Gardener, Innkeeper & Entrepreneur

Twelve years ago it was a blank slate, a large tumbledown structure sporting 4 rentable rooms and a roughhewn garden. But it had the bones, windows bursting with sunlight, a footprint large enough to accommodate a freestanding greenhouse, and ample yard for the richly layered gardens and water features that Ralph envisioned. Topping it all off, the house had historic presence. It was everything and more—it presented opportunity, in spades.

When Ralph Coffey and his partner, Frank Salvo, purchased the 1889 Whitegate Inn, on Chestnut Street in Asheville, N.C., in 1999, it was a turning point. Well, a hairpin curve would be more exact. After all, Ralph had been practicing dentistry in small-town Davidson, N.C., for 23 years. A family man, he had raised two children. Frank, living in Charlotte, was managing Ambulatory Radiology at Carolina's Health Systems. The two men had secure, successful careers. Yet when Frank met Ralph, Ralph had already divorced, retired from dentistry and moved to the Lake Norman. Ralph was searching for something more.

When I met up with Ralph recently at the Whitegate Inn he gave me a pithy assessment of himself, "I am one of those people who likes to reinvent themselves every 10 years." Bravo for that! This is a poignant characteristic of creative types. Ralph often mentions obsessive/compulsive in regards to himself, but this, too, is highly characteristic of those who dive in deeply, study hard and fast, and in the end, create something of true and lasting value. This certainly holds true for the house that Ralph and Frank have built on Chestnut Street, the 1889 Whitegate Inn. But this is more than a story of a bed & breakfast transformation. This is a story of metamorphosis and fruition, metamorphosis and fruition of a life, time and again.

Attuned as Ralph is to his ever-changing nature, he is also keenly aware of his heritage. Ralph was raised in Salisbury, N.C., by James C. Coffey, a family practitioner who kept an office above the drugstore on Main Street and loved to garden. While Ralph's mother taught school, Ralph often accompanied his father on house calls, a way of practicing medicine that his father cherished, and that included, of course, delivering babies. Ralph's father was from Greensboro, and his *mother, Mildred DeWeese Coffey, from*

Salisbury. The two met in college at Mars Hill in Madison County, in 1923.

When Mildred was just a child of 10 or 11, she would ride the train, solo, from Salisbury to Asheville to stay with her aunt. Aunt Lillian, Ralph's great aunt, just happened to live 2 blocks away from what is now the Whitegate Inn! Ralph's roots, both maternal and paternal, spread broadly throughout Western North Carolina. Ralph's father's mother grew up in a small town near Boone called Globe, and his great grandparents even had a farm in West Asheville. Is it any wonder that when Ralph and Frank began to look for B&B properties, they were repeatedly pulled back to Asheville?

After studying medicine at Wake Forest and Chapel Hill, and doing a two year internship in New Orleans, Ralph set up dental practice in Davidson. And although he steadfastly practiced dentistry for 23 years, he did, indeed, reinvent himself along the way. On his 3 ½ acre lot, Ralph found himself—a gardener—in a big way. He cultivated a vegetable garden, a perennial garden, a woodland garden, a shade garden and a bog garden alongside the creek! Obsessive compulsive, hmm?

Ralph also built a 10x12 greenhouse onto his den. When his brother-in-law gave him a gift of 3 orchids, it would take only a handful of years to boost his collection to more than 300. That propitious gift propelled Ralph to the doorstep of the North Carolina Piedmont Orchid Society, eager to learn. Never one to simply partake, Ralph soon became an active board member and then show-chair for the annual Spring Show, a position he held for several years.



In 1999, in preparation for transferring his orchid collection to Asheville, Ralph built a spacious 1200 sq. ft. greenhouse. The greenhouse accommodated his 300+ orchid collection, and more. In recent years, at its all-time high occupancy, Ralph's hothouse has bulged with 1500 orchids. Buyers beware, the lesson about greenhouses, Ralph says, is that you will fill them up! If he had it to do over again, he would build a greenhouse 1/3rd the size, believing this would suffice to accommodate his needs.

With the move to Asheville, Ralph also found his way to the Western North Carolina Orchid Society. At that time, WNCOS had no official board or annual show. When a board was finally assembled, Ralph stepped up. Drawing upon his NCPOS experience, he was particularly instrumental in bringing about the first judged orchid shows to be held at the N.C. Arboretum. Eventually Ralph would serve as president of WNCOS for four years. Ralph Coffey is a dreamer and a doer, a contributor of great value no matter what effort or organization he turns his mind to. His wherewithal and enthusiasm have been instrumental in bringing WNCOS to its status today—a happy, thriving orchid

society brimming with grateful members.

And we haven't even spoken of Ralph the Master Gardener. Master Gardener programs are volunteer programs throughout the country created to advise and educate the public on gardening and horticulture. Ten years ago Ralph completed the rigorous training required to be a Master Gardener. Since that time he has given innumerable talks and tours regarding orchids and horticulture more generally. Lately, his favorite program is The Winter Garden which he has developed from photography of his colorful year-round garden at the Whitegate Inn.

The industriousness of both Ralph and Frank is inspiring. Their accomplishments are tangible and manifold. Yet change is once again midair. Ralph and Frank have taken this property from 4 ho-hum rooms to 11 all-you-could-ask-for getaway havens. The hotel has recently been given the 4 Diamond Award from AAA and is consistently on the Select Registry of Distinguished North American Inns and B&Bs. The unique garden and greenhouse are star attractions, bringing guests from near and far. Nevertheless, Ralph's feet are getting itchy, and Frank is in the midst of a burgeoning acting career. The Inn is officially for sale and Ralph is beginning to cull his orchid collection. He continues, however, to concentrate on his favorites: Phragmepedium, Dendrobium species, species in general and oddball species especially.

Ralph likes unusual plants, in the garden and greenhouse, and he likes his life to be equally surprising. He will undoubtedly continue to walk a path full of novelty and challenge. His motto, after all, is learn by doing. We eagerly await his next transformation, all the while hoping he will keep a bit of his orchid connection intact, especially his connection to WNCOS. Ralph Coffee is one of our most valuable resources, for his orchid expertise, for his equanimity, and for his understated sense of humor. Many thanks to Ralph and the best of luck!





GROWING TIPS for December

By

Courtney T. Hackney

Email: Hackneau@comcast.net

Each year about this time, I notice that some of my terrestrial Jewel Orchids (Jewels) are initiating inflorescences. There are about a half dozen of these variegated beauties scattered around the greenhouse.

Last year, Orchid magazine featured articles on this diverse orchid group. They do not resemble other orchids in that they are grown for their leaves, not flowers, and are generally terrestrial species. Hybridizers have also begun to create more vigorous hybrids with a variety of different patterned leaves. A few now even have colorful inflorescences. Leaves of Jewel Orchids can be striped, mottled, variegated, or with jewel-like spotting, hence the name.

One Jewel orchid has been in collections for years, i.e. *Ludisia discolor*, but others have only recently been introduced. *Ludisia* is easy to grow under a variety of conditions, which explains its popularity. Most of the others grow very differently and require special care.

Cultural requirements vary greatly since they belong to many different genera and come from all over the world; from tropical to temperate climates. It has taken me many years to figure out how to grow them and I have not been successful with all I have tried. The common cultural attribute for Jewels is that they are almost all low light species and typically grow on the forest floor, which should provide some idea of their preference for light. A few like the *Ludisia*, creep along the forest floor and put fine roots down into the decomposing leaves, while most tend to grow from a basal stem, below which are thick, tuberous-looking roots, where the orchid stores its energy.

The key to growing Jewels is to gain some insight into the habitat from which they came. A species that came to me with a request that I provide identification refused to bloom or even grow well. They were listed as coming from Belize, and I assumed warm climate with constant moisture. My as-



sumption was not correct and they actually came from dry forests on the West Coast of Belize. When I provided a distinct wet and dry period associated with more light, they all flowered. The assumption when they were collected was that they were different species because each one had a different pattern on their leaves, but they were all the same species based on their flowers.

All of the “Jewels” that have grown well for me are grown in a porous medium, ProMix HP, with lots of drainage in the bottom of the pot. As the plant gets larger, the depth of medium is increased. Most flower in winter. During the summer, I put all of them under the benches and do not worry about them as they get adequate moisture from dripping pots above. In early December, they are moved into more light. That automatically induces drier conditions and they all begin to flower, although at different times.

Jewels that grow well for me here in the South in a greenhouse with no cooling are *Stenosarcos speciosa* and its hybrid *Strs Vanguard*, *Sarcoglottis scryptroitus*, and *Pelexia laxa*. *Pelexia laxa* is supposed to be a cool growing species, but grows well in my hot conditions, even here in Florida.

Hobbyists growing on windowsills may find that a few Jewels are worth trying as they grow under lower light levels and are beautiful year-round.



Calendar For WNCOS

Dec. 11th—2011 WNCOS Annual Holiday Social

Jan. 8th—Leslie Keller & Graham Ramsey
Columbian Orchid Adventure

For further calendar dates please see www.wncos.org

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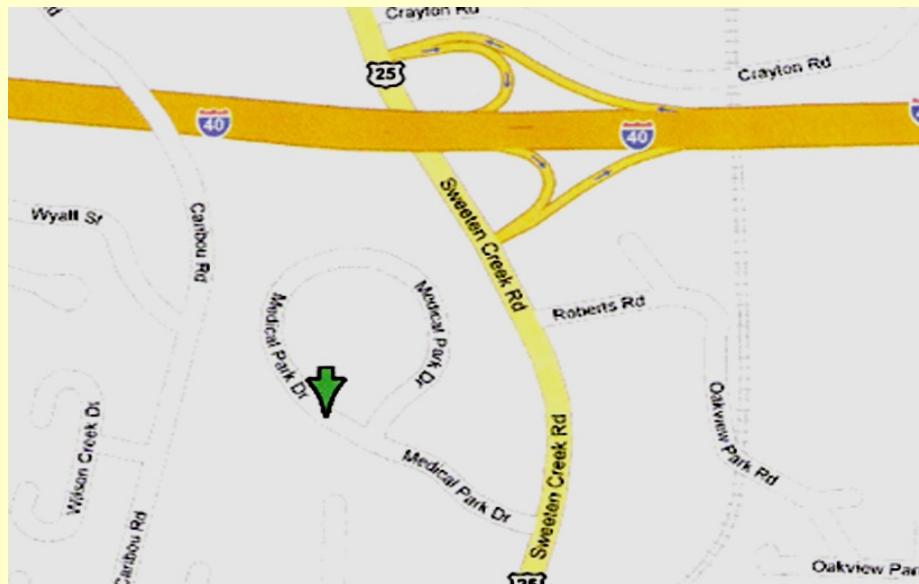
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All newsletter photos by the editor, except when otherwise noted.

The WNCOS meets the second Sunday of each month, at 2:00 pm at Asheville Eye Associates (see map), unless otherwise announced. The Society Board meets the third Tuesday at CAO 5:30 pm. Meetings are open to all members. General meetings are open to the public.



Asheville Eye Associates , 8 Medical Park Drive

Sweeten Creek Road South to Medical Park Drive. Right on Medical Park Drive and follow the circle to Asheville Eye Associates. If coming in on I-40 take exit 51 (route 25 South) Sweeten Creek Road exit. Right on Medical Park Drive and follow the circle to Asheville Eye Associates.

Treasurer's Report

Checking Account Balance: \$4,066.05

Small Business Money Market Account: \$13,885.89

Total: 17,951.94