

Remembering Professor Rogers

Renowned lilac expert, beloved educator

Friday, May 27, 2016

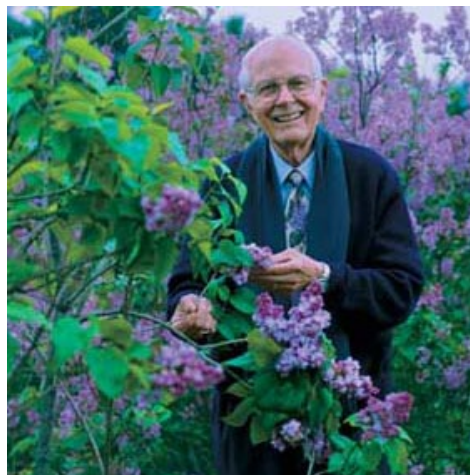


Owen Maurice Rogers, professor emeritus of plant biology in the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, passed away on May 24 at the age of 85.

Rogers, a nationally known lilac expert, [devoted his career to breeding New Hampshire's state flower](#). He was instrumental in developing UNH's lilac breeding program, which spanned 60 years as the longest continuous lilac-breeding program in the country.

Rogers, who retired from UNH in 1996, conducted much of his research at the Woodman Horticultural Research Farm, a facility of the [NH Agricultural Experiment Station](#), which supported Rogers' lifetime of research.

Art Mathieson, professor of plant biology at UNH, says Rogers "was a very kind and thoughtful man and always helped with various projects and



PROFESSOR EMERITUS OWEN ROGERS.

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activities. I miss his wonderful smile and interactions.”

Rogers was among those who solidified UNH’s place as the center of lilac breeding for six decades beginning in the 1940s. Lilacs developed at UNH can be seen behind Thompson Hall on campus and in the faculty neighborhood.

Rogers crossbred thousands of varieties of lilacs and introduced three new lilacs— the Agnes Smith, Jesse Hepler and Marie Rogers lilacs — and was an active member of the International Lilac Society and served on the New Hampshire Governor’s Lilac and Wildflower Commission.

In addition to his lilac breeding work, Rogers taught classes in plant genetics and breeding at UNH, judged flower shows and served in the U.S. Air Force Reserve for 20 years.

Jim Stewart, professor emeritus of biochemistry at UNH, said Rogers was a “genuinely enthusiastic teacher. He brought his sense of humor, always gracious but sometime edgy, into the classroom. Students always paid rapt attention and actually enjoyed his classes.”

While on sabbatical in 1975, Rogers compiled a lilac register that was published by the NH Agricultural Experiment Station in 1976.

The success of the registry meant “anybody who wanted to announce a new lilac had to go through UNH. This encouraged much interchange of information about lilacs with the UNH staff, who in turn connected to a larger network worldwide,” notes Bradley Bittorf of the International Lilac Society.

Freek Vrugtman, curator emeritus of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Ontario, Canada, and International Lilac Registrar for the Royal Botanical Gardens, who now manages the registry of lilacs, adds, “Owen’s values, his knowledge, and ideas have been passed on to the younger generations. I was lucky to get to know him and work with him.”

Rogers is survived by his wife, Marie Rogers, of Durham; two daughters, Mary Rogers LaPolice and her husband, Matthew LaPolice, of Durham, and Lucy Parkman of Dover, and a grandson, Troy LaPolice of Durham.

“He was a very gregarious person, and he loved UNH. He felt he had been blessed in life as far as his academic career and opportunities. He loved his family, and was especially happy to be able to spend time with his grandson,” notes Janet Sullivan, adjunct associate professor of biological sciences and collections manager of the Hodgdon Herbarium.

A community celebration of his life is planned for a future date at the Durham Community Church.

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