

An advocate for bamboo

If there is one thing that I remember about Ned Jaquith, it was his laugh. He had a very distinguishable laugh that had an infectious effect on all who heard it; it always made me smile. And it was a joy to see the twinkle in his eyes, and how his face lit up.

When Ned died in 2012, way before his time, he left a legacy in the bamboo world that would be very difficult to duplicate today. He was a business owner, grower, manager, traveler, and a lover of all growing things, especially bamboo.

Once Ned was bitten by the “bamboo bug” at a young age, he began a never-ending quest to learn everything he could about the plant.

He began his bamboo business in his backyard and soon ran out of room. Then, in the early 1990s, he moved his business to a vacant lot that was tucked behind a florist shop in Milwaukie, Ore., and called it the Bamboo Garden. This, too, was not enough space. In 2004, he relocated the business to a 20-acre site in the countryside, outside of North Plains, Ore.

Ned initially referred to this site as the “forest” because of all of the trees. He would often tell his staff, before the move, that he was going to go work in the forest.

This forest became a world-class bamboo nursery, with greenhouses for growing the tender varieties. There are also shipping docks to accommodate semi-trucks for shipping bamboo to 49 states (all except Hawaii), plus Canada.

Today, Bamboo Garden is a showcase for more than 350 species, cultivars and seedlings of bamboo, making it the largest specialty bamboo nursery in the United States.

Educating the public

In addition to building his business, Ned started the Pacific Northwest

What I'm Hearing

Mike Darcy



Chapter of the American Bamboo Society and remained a very active member. He traveled throughout the United States and abroad to teach the virtues of bamboo and to learn more about them. Ned had a thirst for knowledge. He always

Part of the problem was that there were very few places that the home gardener could visit to see bamboo growing in a somewhat natural setting. This was one of the reasons for the creation of his 20-acre nursery. There, visitors can see groves of many different bamboo species and learn about the running types, as well as those types that are clumping, or non-running.

With Ned's death, there were many people who wanted to honor him in some way, and so the Ned Jaquith Foundation was established.

It was spearheaded by a close friend, Susanne Lucas, who is past-president of the American Bamboo Society and has served on the board for 15 years. She is currently executive director of the World Bamboo Organization and president of the Ned Jaquith Foundation.

The goal of the Ned Jaquith Foundation is to educate and encourage the public concerning all facets of bamboo cultivation and enjoyment.

A secondary component of the foundation is to encourage and support bamboo research projects and to allow people to take their ideas and run with them. Ned was always receptive and relished new ideas, and this foundation is a perfect tribute to his inquiring mind.



Ned Jaquith

wanted to learn about new bamboo species and to make certain that what was on the market was identified correctly.

One of Ned's goals was to educate the public about growing bamboo. His ideas were not just for commercial use, but for the home gardener as well.

Ned felt that there were too many negative connotations regarding bamboo. He wanted to dispel them. He felt that bamboo had gotten a bad rap as being an aggressive and invasive plant, resulting in homeowners often shying away from it.

The dream continues

Today, Bamboo Garden is alive and well. Ned's wife, Nancy Oberschmidt, has maintained ownership. Noah Bell serves as the general manager.

Noah was 17 years old when he met Ned, and several years later, he was hired part time to water the bamboo. That job soon became full time. Noah is now responsible for maintaining the nursery, providing a positive direction for the staff, and overseeing the production of more than 350 types of bamboo. ▶



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▲ WHAT I'M HEARING

I have met Noah many times over the years. I have found him to be a sponge for soaking in information about all things bamboo. Like his mentor, Ned, Noah is on an ongoing quest for bamboo knowledge. I can see that Ned left his beloved nursery in good hands.

The two of them share not just a love of bamboo, but the same principles of customer service. Ned believed in treating everyone with respect and dignity. He did not care whether they would be a major customer or someone making just a few purchases. Noah has the same belief, and runs Bamboo Garden the same way.

Another important ingredient is education. Noah encourages the staff at Bamboo Gardens to continue to expand their knowledge by attending workshops and lectures, and traveling to see other bamboo sites.

In a continuing quest to expand the palette of bamboo for the public, Bamboo Garden is now working with Hoyt Arboretum in Portland to establish a half-acre plot of diverse bamboo groves that would be planted as a walk-through forest.

Bamboo Garden is providing plants, consultation, design and installation. The plot will include bamboo varieties representing North and South America, Africa and Asia. It is due to open in 2015. Ned would be proud.

If you would like to make a donation to continue Ned's work to help educate the next generation in the field of bamboo culture, you can send it to:

Ned Jaquith Foundation
c/o Bamboo Garden
18900 N.W. Collins Road
North Plains, OR 97123

The Ned Jaquith Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. To learn more about it, log on to www.nedjaquithfoundation.org.

Mike Darcy is the host of "In the Garden with Mike Darcy," a radio program airing at 9 a.m. Saturdays on KXL 101 FM in Portland. He can be reached at itgmikedarcy@comcast.net.