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Shaffer's Orchids

The World's Best

Right In Capitola

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel Garden Writer

The family tradition at Shaffer's Tropical Gardens in Capitola has been rewarded by the American Orchid Society, which has credited Shaffer's as being the world's most influential breeder in the development of white phalaenopsis orchids.

In a Society bulletin, author John Moses lauded the father-and-son team of Keith and Richard Shaffer as being most responsible for improvements in white phalaenopsis since World War II.

Clones of awarded white phalaenopsis registered by Shaffer's have been used an astounding 426 times in new crosses, according to Moses.

Additionally, awards for flower quality to clones of white Shaffer originations total 80 and clones of Shaffer crosses have sired 76 award-winning, first-generation crosses!

Located at 1220 41st Ave., the Shaffer tradition began in 1937 with Keith started the business.

Keith is now retired and lives in Scotts Valley, and the business is run today by his son, Richard.

It encompasses 12 greenhouses representing more than one acre under glass. Tropical plants, such as orchids — and specifically phalaenopsis — are featured.

Phalaenopsis orchids are more commonly known as "moth orchids." Pronounced Fail-en-op-sis, they are ideal house plants and thrive in same temperatures and ventilation as African violets. They are also fast growers and bloom, sometimes as many as 100 flowers on a single spray, about six months of the year.

The first recorded phalaenopsis occurred in 1825 in the Dutch East Indies. Its "moth orchid" name came soon after because its specific white flowers in the native jungle habitat resembled white moths in flight.

Keith Shaffer expressed surprise and happiness at the distinction by the American Orchid Society. "It's kind of hard to believe," he said. "For 25 or 30 years we just minded our own business and now we're told we're the tops in white phalaenopsis."

For Keith, "minding his own business" involved several hundred crosses each year. Soon they had registered crosses with the Royal Horticultural Society in London. The effort came to a head in 1969 when Shaffer's won the world championship in Australia at the World Orchid Conference.

Why white phalaenopsis?

Richard explained that the whites were simply known as the pure orchid. "When people think of moth orchids, they immediately think of the beautiful, white orchid."

He added that, at the time, there were no persons really specializing in phalaenopsis. Shaffer's decided to take on the task in a "scientific" capacity.

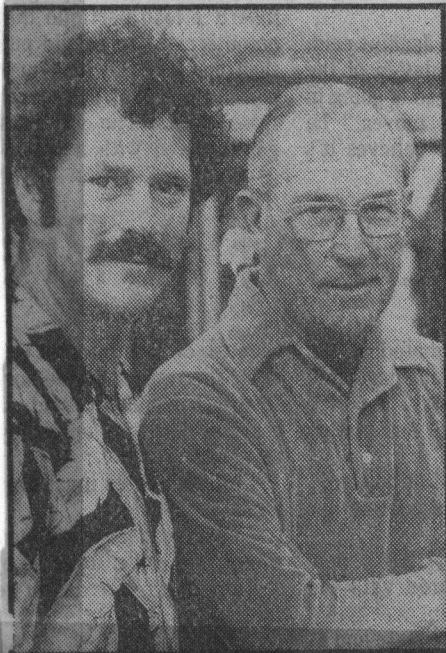
According to Keith, that involved the quality selection of specimens. "We searched at orchid houses all over the world from Hawaii to France and England," he explained. "After we got the best plants, we started the selection process to make crosses."

Keith first started naming his white specimens Spanish names since it followed the California past. As success began to mount, though, they turned to cities and then family members.

Thus, there are phalaenopsis called Santa Cruz and Capitola. Both Keith and Richard have ones after themselves, as well as uncles, aunts and other relatives.

After all these years and the hundreds of crosses, Keith maintains his all-time favorite remains Phalaenopsis Elinor Shaffer — named after his wife.

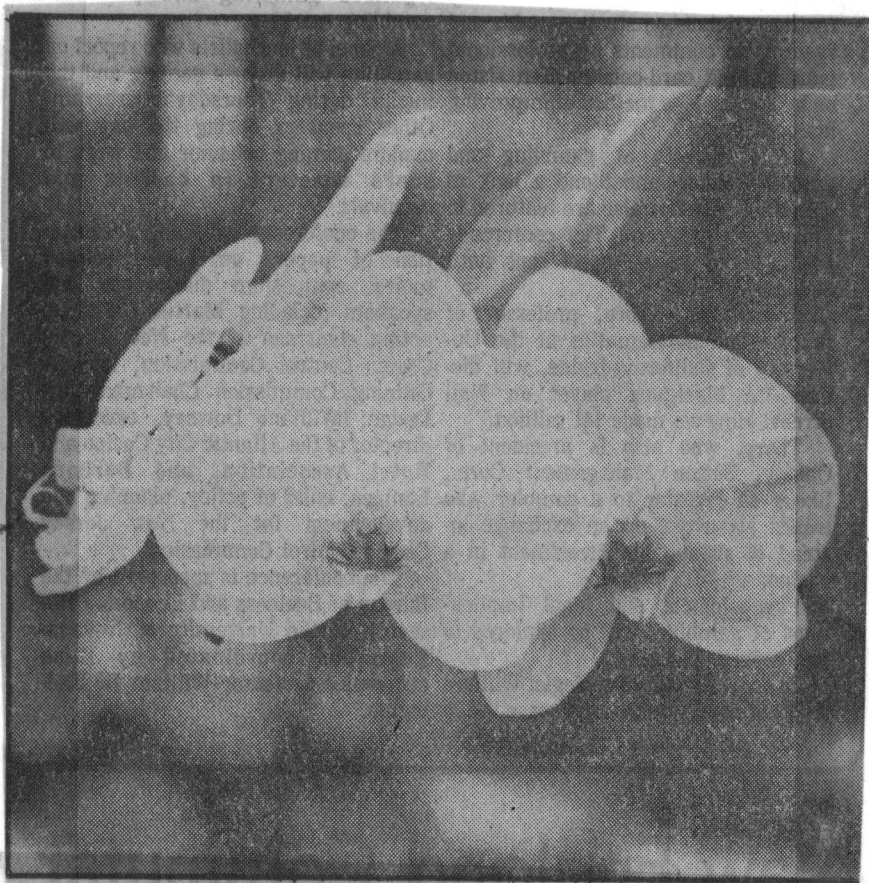
Many of these award-winning specimens are available at Shaffer's Tropical Gardens — the world's best at white phalaenopsis.



Richard and Keith Shaffer

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Shaffer's prize-winning white Phalaenopsis