

OBITUARY

Thomas John Sheehan (1924–2016)

MARIAN SHEEHAN

3823 SW 3rd Avenue, Gainesville, Florida 32607, U.S.A.
snairam25@yahoo.com



Thomas John Sheehan, 92, peacefully passed away May 24, 2016 at his home in Gainesville, Florida. Born April 13, 1924 to Thomas and Emma Sheehan in Brooklyn, New York, and raised in St. Albans, New York, Tom had three siblings: Cecelia, Miriam and Philip.

He was educated at P.S. 136 St Albans, Cathedral College of the Immaculate Conception HS, Brooklyn New York; Dartmouth College (AB) and Cornell University (M.S.; PhD). Tom joined the Marines in December, 1942 and served as a weather forecaster until 1945 when the Marines transferred him to a Naval V-12 program at Dartmouth. He was discharged in March, 1946.

He married Marion Elizabeth Ruff in June, 1950 and they had three children: Thomas, Peter and Marian. After graduation from Cornell in 1952, he got a job at the Georgia Agriculture Experiment Station in Griffin, GA as a horticulturist. In 1954 he joined the staff of the Ornamental Horticulture Department at the University of Florida and was involved in extension

teaching and research for the next 37 years. He also served as Chairman of the Department before retiring. His specialty crop was orchids and he was deeply involved in the international orchid scene.

Tom attended 18 of the 21 World Orchid Conferences (WOC), missing only the first, fourth and seventh. He was a speaker at ten World Orchid Conferences, as well as the program chairman for the 11th WOC in Miami, Florida. He was awarded the World Orchid Conference Medal for outstanding contributions to the science and practice of Orchidology during the 21st WOC in Johannesburg, South Africa. He authored books about orchids and served, with his wife Marion, as co-author of the longest running series, *Orchid Genera Illustrated*, in the American Orchid Society's monthly magazine, the *American Orchid Society Bulletin* (today *Orchids*). Tom was the recipient of two AOS Gold Medals of Achievement, only the third person in the organization's history to be so recognized. In addition, he served for 14 years as the American Orchid Society's representative to the

Royal Horticultural Society Advisory Committee on Orchid Hybrid Registration.

Tom also served as a consultant for the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization on cut flower production in Singapore, Kenya, Guyana, Barbados and Bolivia, as well as for the Canadian Aluminum Corp in Jamaica. He was also an active member of the Florida State

Horticulture Society, where he served as Vice President, President and Chairman of the Board, as well as program coordinator for 11 years.

He is survived by his son Thomas, his daughter-in-law Suwannarat, his granddaughter Alisa Rose and his daughter Marian. He was preceded in death by his wife, Marion and son, Peter.