

Natalie Uhl Awarded Robert Allerton Medal by the National Tropical Botanical Garden



The 2003 Robert Allerton Award was presented to Dr. Natalie Whitford Uhl by Dr. David Lorence of the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG). The Allerton Award honors an individual who has demonstrated excellence in tropical botany or horticulture and is named for one of the founding trustees and a principal initial benefactor of the NTBG. The award is given either for a specific achievement or to reflect an entire career in science. It consists of a bronze medal designed by Joseph Feher of the Honolulu Academy of Arts and an honorarium of \$1000. The biennial meeting of the International Palm Society in Hilo, Hawaii was chosen as a venue to grant Dr. Uhl well-deserved recognition before a group of her peers and fellow palm enthusiasts.

The Robert Allerton Award recognizes Dr. Uhl's lifetime career in plant science. She is a well-known plant systematist, anatomist and morphologist, and, since 1987, Professor Emerita at Cornell University. In 1940 she obtained her bachelor's degree in botany from Rhode Island State College specializing in plant anatomy. Attending Cornell University during the war years, she studied plant anatomy for her Master's degree, which she obtained in 1943. She began her Ph.D. program at Cornell the same year and married Charles Uhl in 1945. After successfully defending her thesis in 1947, she took a 13-year gap from academia to raise four children. In 1963 Natalie was appointed as Research Associate at Cornell and began collaborating with Professor Harold E. (Hal) Moore, Jr. at the L.H. Bailey Hortorium.

Together they worked toward a comprehensive synthesis of the genera in the large and economically important palm family. Her numerous detailed studies of the inflorescence, floral structure and development of palms, and her evolutionary surveys throughout the family formed a basis for the classification used by Moore, who died in 1980 before completing his life's work. Uhl then collaborated with Dr. John Dransfield, palm specialist at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, resulting in the completion of the monumental book titled *Genera Palmarum*, which was finally published in 1987.

Uhl and Dransfield with four new co-authors (Drs. Connie B. Asmussen, William J. Baker, Madeline Harley and Carl E. Lewis) are currently revising *Genera Palmarum* incorporating new molecular data, cladistic analyses and other important advances in knowledge of the evolutionary relationships of palms gained since the 1987 edition. Dr. Uhl served as co-editor with Dransfield of the journal *Principes* (now *Palms*) from 1979 to 2000. It is notable that Natalie Uhl was able to become a distinguished scientist while successfully raising a family of four children, essentially pursuing two full-time careers. Always the dedicated researcher, Natalie was not able to attend the meetings in Hawaii due to publication deadlines. Her colleague, Dr. Scott Zona of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, accepted the award on her behalf at the International Palm Society banquet.

DAVID H. LORENCE