

# GREATER LAS VEGAS ORCHID SOCIETY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2003 12:30 PM

At my house!!

**Carol Siegel, Newsletter Editor**

CAROL SIEGEL- PRESIDENT  
CLARICE DEAN -VICE-PRESIDENT  
EILEEN MCKYTON- SECRETARY  
DIANA SMITH- TREASURER

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Clarice Dean- Trip Chairman

John Haydukavitch-Video Chief

Shelly North-Classy Club Apparel Chairlady

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December 7, 2003	Fourth Annual International Food Fest/Holiday Party
January 4, 2004	John Salventi, Parkside Orchids, "Dendrobium"
February 1, 2004	Carol Siegel "The Sex Life of Orchids"
March 7, 2004	Ron Coleman "Wild Orchids of North America"
April 4, 2004	Charles Rowden, "Orchid Photography"
May 2, 2004	Norman Fang, Owner of Norman's Orchids "Phalaenopsis"
June 6, 2004	Glen Decker, Owner Piping Rock Orchids, "Phragmipedium"

July 11, 2004	Virtual Greenhouse Tour SECOND SUNDAY
August 1, 2004	Barbecue
Sept 12, 2004	Mike Blitz, Exotic Orchids of Maui SECOND SUNDAY
October 3, 2004	Aaron Hicks, "The Orchid Seed Bank"
November 7, 2004	The Further Exploits of Bill Bergstrom in Mexico
December 5, 2004	Fifth International Food Fest and Holiday Party
January 9, 2005	Mike Glikbarg SECOND SUNDAY
February 6, 2005	Alan Koch, Gold Country Orchids, "Orchid Growing For Dummies"

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Don't forget that on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, we will be having our Holiday Party and International Food Fest at my house at 12:30 pm with great food, music, margaritas (ah, the margaritas), certificates of appreciation, and our annual tradition, the Christmas Orchids. This year we have ordered cattleyas and mini-cattleyas in bud from Carmela Orchids. The club pays \$5-6 and the member pays \$5-6 and gets an orchid worth at least \$25. (We are still negotiating the price for the orchids- \$10 or \$12...)

I will provide ribs, duck, rice, tiramasu, paper goods, drinks, margaritas and wine, a keyboard player (with a keyboard) and a roaming magician(!). ONCE AGAIN, WE ASK EVERYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO TO BRING A FEW CANS OR BOXES OF FOOD FOR US TO DONATE TO THE SALVATION ARMY AS PART OF OUR ANNUAL COMMUNITY GOOD DEED. Everyone is asked to bring a dish for 10-12 people (salad, main dish, casserole, or dessert...) Make sure that your food is sliced already if it is supposed to be sliced, hot, if it is supposed to be hot, and includes serving spoons!! We have some limited ability to reheat items, but not for 100 items...Scotty Nogaim is bringing a turkey, Steve Ninemire is bringing a roast beef, and Al DeRicco is bringing a ham. To give you an idea, Terry Wilsey is bringning spinach salad and Jeri Lee is bringing a salad and dessert. You are welcome to bring your mate or a friend, but be sure to bring a little extra food so it will all work out. We will not have show and tell, but Daniel will sell plants. If you would like to order orchids from him for Christmas, give him a call(562-569-1181 or [Kingsparadise03@aol.com](mailto:Kingsparadise03@aol.com)) If you can't cook, you can buy something or bring a bottle

of wine which we will auction off at the White Elephant Sale in January. A map to get to my house is included at the end of the newsletter.

Speaking of White Elephant Sales, we are having our fourth annual sale on January 4<sup>th</sup> at our meeting. This fun event made almost \$1000 last year and is lots easier than selling stuff to strangers. (WE will buy almost anything...) Bring the stuff you bought last year or bring books, CD's, VHS's (they made over \$300 alone...), knick knacks you are tired of, orchids, orchid stuff, vases, Xmas presents you don't want, kitchen stuff, just anything. Last year we had two bikes. I bought a great brass lamp for \$4 that is sitting on my desk and several bottles of wine from the Xmas party. Bring stuff, buy stuff. It's for a good cause, US, AND it pays for several speakers.

By the way, bravo to Alex McKyton who has gotten recognition for our club from the IRS as a 501(c) (3) organization. We are now "exempt from federal income tax under section 501a of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described in section 501 (c) (3)....Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to you or for your use are deductible from Federal, estate, and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of sections...Donors may deduct contributions to you only to the extent that their contributions are gifts, with no consideration received."

The bottom line is that money and things you give to the club should be able to be deducted from your taxes. If you give a bike to the White Elephant Sale, we should be able to give you a receipt to take off your taxes. If the Mirage gives us orchids, they should be able to take the gift off their taxes. We are, of course, not IRS experts, but we will provide anyone who requests (254-4168 [growlove@cox.net](mailto:growlove@cox.net)) with a copy of the complete IRS letter. I will bring a few copies to the meeting in January and keep several on file. Show it to your accountant for a ruling in your case. Bring stuff to the White Elephant Sale. It might save you money, too.

Speaking of money, it is time to renew your orchid club membership. The price is still \$25 for singles, \$35 for couples (defined as two members at the same address). We hope you feel, as I do, that it is a really good value. You can pay at the party or you can send me a check made out to GLVOS. My address is Carol Siegel 8601 Robinson Ridge Drive Las Vegas, NV 89117 254-4168.

Our November meeting was a party, once again. A full house of members welcomed guests Julie and Tammy Wynn, Tita Owen, Oscar Schmidt, Helen and Doug Wells, Zaida Cadecias, and Transito and Morena Escobar (I hope I got the spelling right...) Becky Biondi, Nita Bragg, Christina De La Cruz, Dan Mumau and Mike Lawless prepared a feast for us to eat, and Dan Vong prepared a flowering orchid feast for us to buy. He very kindly gave everyone free samples of fertilizer. Thanks so much, again, Dan. The raffle table overflowed with plants thanks to Daniel who supplied orchids and bark and Dan Mumau and Mike Lawless who donated hotel plants. Great news!! Steve Ninemire thinks he will be able to get us hotel phals for future raffles!! We are really grateful to all our raffle beggers and shleppers.

We missed Gary Nelson who has had back surgery and hope he is back soon. We welcomed back Tony Billitere after his successful surgery and were thrilled to see him. We thank him for selling Entertainment Books to benefit the club.

Clarice presented our "Species of the Month" which was *Doritis pulcherrima*, which is found from northeast India through Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaya, Sumatra and Bornia. This small terrestrial plant is an easy-growing cousin of phalaenopsis with which it is often crossed to produce Doritaenopsis hybrids. Doritis contributes a long flowering season, great color, compact growth and upright spike habit.

Our speaker, Karen Muir, Pacific Judging Chairman, delighted us with a talk on the Japanese Grand Prix, the Super Bowl of Orchids. 450,000 people visit the show at \$18 a head and prizes are awarded in excess of \$170,000!! Grand Prize is \$20,000 and a Mercedes. KEEP GROWING AND BUY YOUR TICKETS TO JAPAN FROM TERRY WILSEY, OUR RESIDENT TRAVEL AGENT!!! The show is half vendors and half display, and people pay \$35 on opening night for the first crack at the vendors. It was a very entertaining talk, and we loved it.

A heads-up on our January 4, 2004 speaker, John Salventi, who will be coming from his nursery in Pennsylvania with his partner Tom to speak about great dendrobiums to add to your collection and how to take care of them. Parkside Orchids is one of my favorite website places to buy orchids, featuring a wide variety of fabulous species and hybrids. I buy most of my phrags from them, but they have lots of

other things. They are coming from far away by plane and can't bring LOTS of plants although they will bring some. They will bring special orders you make with them. After December 15<sup>th</sup>, you can look on their website

([www.parksideorchids.com](http://www.parksideorchids.com)) under Tom's Specials especially (in bud and spike!) and call them with your order (610-847-8039) or e-mail at [parkside@ptd.net](mailto:parkside@ptd.net).

You won't have to pay shipping because they will bring the plants with them. You can discuss what you want with them over the phone if you don't have a computer. I have been very pleased with the quality of the plants they have sold me, find they are a great value, have wonderful roots and leaves and flowers- a genuinely good experience.

Steve Ninemire, our dynamic new librarian, has lot of plans for the library. We are buying a library cart for our books, and Dennis Dean is building us a locked cabinet for it. Remember that the library is free!! You give us a \$25 check which we never cash just as a kind of deposit on the books. To date, we have never cashed one of the deposit checks. We have hundreds of books and magazines. Take advantage of this wonderful resource.

This week, our club article on "The Native Orchids of Nevada", which I wrote, came out in The North American Native Orchid Journal. I am excited, too, that my article on "Ten Warning Signs of Orchid Addiction", which was in the October 2002 newsletter, will be printed in the Orchid Digest in June 2004. Fun!

Elections were held by Scotty Nogaim, and last year's board was grateful to be re-elected again. It is lots of fun to work with these smart, capable people. Diana Smith picks me up hours before our meetings, helps me load the car, open the building, set out all the stuff and pack up again at the end- door to door service. Of course, we laugh and visit the whole time, but I could not do it without her. She is such an asset with her money-sense, energy, wisdom and friendship. Clarice Dean and Eileen McKyton are special blessings because they are a two-for-one (four-for-two?) deal. You get Alex with Eileen and Dennis with Clarice, and the men are real professionals who contribute to the smooth running of the club. Alex is our building chairman and always runs the setup and teardown of the meeting as well as the A-V Setup. My husband always tells me, "Don't worry. Just ask Alex to help you..." He is the webmaster of our website([www.glvos.com](http://www.glvos.com)) which he and Eileen pay for themselves, and has written an article on how to set up a website. Eileen is one of the friendly, smiling hospitality folks who greet members and make guests feel at

home. Her advertising savvy each month has gotten the word out about our club, and she has also run several sales for the club, as well as gotten speakers, housed them, and provided Xmas orchids. Dennis, another treasure, built us our "CHAIR MOVER", saving us time and energy, and is building our library cabinets. He comes early, setting up the room and displaying his many gorgeous orchids. He did a great display of orchids at the Fall Garden Show and took down the whole show as well. He is a wonderful man. Clarice, our brilliant and talented vice-president, sets up our Orchid Safaris to shows and nurseries as well as presenting our "Species of the Month" and orchid mating club which were her idea! She brings lots of orchids to meetings, helps with the Fall Garden Club display, and writes articles for the newsletter. Most of all, her intelligence and enthusiasm have been a special gift to me and to the club. As for me, I am honored to be included in this talented circle.

The president of the South Dakota Orchid Society sent Clarice an article from the St. Petersburg Times which I have reprinted with their permission and a fee paid. The last issue of the ORCHID DIGEST had a magnificent cover featuring the newly-discovered *Phragmipedium kovachii*. A stunning magenta flower from Peru, it has a natural flower spread of 18 cm or 7 ½ inches! In his article, "Phragmipedium Kovachii in the Wild," Dr. Harold Koopowitz describes his harrowing climb to see the flower in the wild at the top of a mountain, accompanied by Karen Muir, our November speaker. In the "hike from hell", in driving rains and incredible wet muck, he thrilled to see thousands of the big purple flowers. The discovery of this new species is important for the size and color it can impart to hybrids. Illegal stripping of the orchids, which sell for \$1000 a plant in Europe, has already raised worries about the survival of the species in the wild. The article I have included tells the bizarre tale of intrigue and crime that resulted when the man for whom the orchid was named illegally took the orchid back to Selby in the United States. ENJOY!

I have asked Clarice to write an article on great nurseries she has visited in California. Following is the second installment of her three-part series. It is so well-written and informative that I am sure you will be thrilled. This is part of our continuing effort to land you all in the poorhouse.

See you in December at the Holiday Party!! Love ya, Carol

## A whiff of scandal

**The orchid was incredibly beautiful and exceedingly rare. But in its allure lay the seeds of destruction for the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and those who were seduced by the lust for a flower.**

By CRAIG PITTMAN, Times Staff Writer

Published November 2, 2003

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SARASOTA - Each year more than 160,000 people stroll through Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and are dazzled by its spectacular orchid collection, from showy Cattleyas to delicate Paphiopedilums.

But the most important orchid in Selby Gardens' history is not on display.

It's the one that could wreck the place.

When orchid collector Michael Kovach first spotted it at a roadside stand in Peru, he knew he had never seen anything like it: a tall stalk topped with a bloom as big as a man's hand, its petals a hot pink shading into deep purple.

As Kovach carried that dazzling flower into a roomful of Selby Gardens' scientists in June 2002, he was greeted by "a simultaneous wave of eye-widening and mouth opening," Kovach wrote in an orchid-collector newsletter.

Selby's staff moved quickly to lay claim to the honor of naming the new orchid.

Working around the clock, they cranked out a scientific description and published it in a special edition of Selby's own journal.

At Kovach's request, they named the plant after him: *Phragmipedium kovachii*.

The announcement, hailed as one of the biggest orchid discoveries in 100 years, garnered international acclaim for the 13-acre institution on Sarasota Bay.

Making the triumph even sweeter was the fact that Selby had beaten into print a rival orchid expert who was on the verge of publishing his own scientific description of the new species.

But the taste of triumph soured.

Peruvian officials lodged a formal complaint. Two months after he walked into Selby Gardens with the orchid, Kovach's greenhouse in Virginia was raided by federal agents. They rooted through Selby Gardens' records, too. A federal grand jury in Tampa has subpoenaed a dozen Selby employees and board members.

As the yearlong investigation draws to a close, Selby is likely to be charged with violating laws designed to protect endangered plants from poachers. Selby's staff believes prosecutors will make an example of them to placate Peru, said Selby's crisis management consultant, Jeffrey Tucker.

A criminal conviction could bring large fines and the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in grant money. Individuals could even face jail time. Attorneys' fees already are squeezing the garden's \$3.2-million budget.

"It's a real mess," said Paul Martin Brown, author of *Wild Orchids of Florida*. "It tarnishes Selby's reputation."

The orchid scandal has so exacerbated tension among Selby's leadership that the executive director and eight board members have resigned. Furious donors are withholding contributions.

Selby officials are "all kind of shocked at how they got into the middle of this," Tucker said. They had nothing but the best of intentions, he said.

To Eric Christenson, the rival beaten by Selby, none of this is surprising. He says Selby's staff should never have let Kovach in the door.

"These people are idiots," he said. "Everyone involved knew it was illegal."

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How could so much trouble stem from a single flower? To Lee Moore the answer is obvious.

A veteran orchid collector whose business cards identify him as "The Adventurer," Moore advised Kovach in Peru. He says Kovach's craving for fame overrode concerns about legalities.

"Oh, the cost of fame," said Moore, chuckling.

Kovach (pronounced KO-vack), 48, lives in rural Virginia. Once a carpenter, he says God led him to the orchid business.

It was a heavenly calling into a hellish obsession.

While most orchid fanciers are content with the selection at Home Depot, a few are willing to blow \$10,000 on one plant or brave any hardship to discover a new species. Orchid Fever author Eric Hansen blames the flowers' sensual form. The tumescent blooms and intoxicating scent can cloud a collector's judgment.



Driven by passion, some orchid fanciers would spend their last dime for a flower such as the one Kovach found.

"When a man falls in love with orchids, he'll do anything to possess the one he wants," Norman McDonald wrote in his 1939 book *The Orchid Hunters*. "It's like chasing a green-eyed woman or taking cocaine, it's a sort of madness."

But such madness may run afoul of the law. Wild orchids are protected by an international treaty called the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. It prohibits collecting endangered plants in the wild for export. Trade is permitted only if the exporting country certifies the plants were grown in a nursery or laboratory.

Few orchid experts like the treaty's rules, Brown said, and some would like to get rid of them. Thousands of orchids can be destroyed by a new road but collecting a few for scientific study can be nearly impossible.

One orchid expert, Guido Braeme, punched out a customs official who accused him of smuggling. Still, Braeme was fined because he had no export permit for an orchid preserved in alcohol since 1822.

According to Braeme, the rules are particularly maddening when the orchid is newly discovered. To get a permit to export it for study requires listing a name, but at that point there is no name.

"You smuggle or you cheat," Braeme explained. "Legally you can't win."

Still, botanical gardens continue to describe new species from other countries, Braeme said, suggesting they were all "based on illegal plants."

Christenson, Kovach's rival who used to work for Selby, says he quit when he was ordered to write a grant proposal for propagating an illegally obtained orchid.

"Everyone treats it with a kind of a nudge-nudge, wink-wink," Christenson said. "This is what all botanical gardens are doing."

Selby's own rules require permits for plants shipped to its Orchid Identification Center. But so many orchids are sent to Selby "the Gardens does not require the submitters to provide documentation as to the sources of the plants," center director Wesley Higgins wrote last year.

Moore says in all his years of shipping orchids to Selby, "nobody ever said boo about permits."

So Moore says he advised Kovach to put his orchid in a suitcase and head for Selby without a permit.

"I know he's supposed to have a permit . . . and he knows that very well, too," Moore said. But Moore said he told Kovach: "Take the (expletive) thing up there to Selby. If you try for a permit, you'll never get a permit."

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Moore has spent 25 years traipsing around South American jungles, collecting pre-Columbian art and new orchid species. Several are named for him.

In *The Orchid Thief*, author Susan Orlean quotes Moore's Peruvian wife, Chady, as saying, "We were always smuggling something. . . . We had more going on, more situations than Indiana Jones! Oh, my God!"

The Moores live in Miami but are building a nursery near the Peruvian city of Moyobamba. In 1996, flying back to Miami, Moore met Kovach. They started talking orchids and friendship blossomed.

"He told me once, 'Lee, you're famous because you've got a lot of plants named for you. I wish I could have a plant named for me,' " Moore recalled.

Last year, they agreed to rendezvous in Peru. In an orchid-collector newsletter published this summer, Kovach wrote that he went there to "discuss setting up a species production facility," using the Moores' nursery. He said they cut a deal. Moore denies it.

On May 26, 2002, Kovach hired the Moores' driver to take him orchid hunting. About 3:30 p.m., Kovach wrote, they stopped at a place the map called El Progreso, actually just a truck stop.

Farmers were selling orchids in the parking lot. Kovach picked out a few from a young brother and sister. The woman offered to fetch some special plants from behind the building.

"She then quickly reappeared cradling three pots containing plants with large dark rose flowers," Kovach wrote. "They appeared to be slipper orchids of some kind, but I'd never seen anything like this."

Kovach says he bought all three for \$3.60 each.

When Kovach showed them to his mentor later, Moore was stunned at their beauty. He remembered Kovach's hankering to have an orchid named after him. He says he told Kovach, "This is your chance. You've got the Holy Grail of orchids."

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In the Garden of Eden, Adam named everything. These days it's more complicated. There are strict rules on publishing new scientific names, and only certain taxonomists can do the naming.

The American Orchid Society's list of approved taxonomists consists of just 23 experts, none in Peru. Last year, five were affiliated with Selby, more than any other botanical garden.

Selby's experts knew about the orchid before Kovach arrived on June 5, 2002. A Texas grower had e-mailed them photos he had seen. They had also heard that

Christenson had penned a description for Orchids magazine, to be published June 17.

Kovach wrote that Higgins, the center director, told him "a race for access to the plant had developed. He said it looked like I had won that race." As a result, Selby beat Christenson into print by five days.

Christenson had wanted to name the new orchid *Phragmipedium peruvianum* as a salute to Peru. He based his description on photos that had been e-mailed to him by a Peruvian nursery owner, because all ladyslipper orchids are on a most-endangered list.

"Anyone with half a brain cell doesn't go near them," Christenson said. "They're the pandas of the orchid world. . . . When somebody shows up with an orchid like that, you either quietly tell them to go away or you call the cops."

Selby's experts did neither. Kovach's newsletter account makes no mention of anyone asking him for permits. But in a December 2002 letter to federal authorities, Selby's attorney wrote: "Kovach advised Selby Gardens staff that he had legally imported the orchid into the United States and subsequently provided Selby Gardens with certain USDA permits and Peruvian certificates to support them."

After Selby's scientists accepted Kovach's flower they asked him what to call it, and he told them to use his name.

"I thought, well why not? I've worked long and hard; it can't hurt," Kovach wrote. Christenson says naming it *kovachii* was tantamount to saying, "Hey, come arrest me!"

Three months later U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officers raided Kovach's greenhouse. Then they hit Selby with a grand jury subpoena.

Kovach contends he didn't need a permit because he wasn't transporting the orchid for commercial purposes, an argument experts don't buy.

"His claim is nonsense," said Ned Nash of the American Orchid Society.

Selby's legal problems are more complicated.

Kovach left the orchid at Selby Gardens. After Selby's scientists finished, they shipped it to a museum in Peru without a permit.

"In the strictest sense of the word, they broke the law," Nash said.

They also did not send back the entire plant.

As the scientists stood around Kovach's orchid "it began striking everyone that this was the last they were going to see of this," said Tucker, Selby's consultant. "It was taken from a high altitude in Peru and it was not going to survive in Sarasota. And someone said, 'Why kill the last condor?' "

So one Selby expert, John Atwood, took a piece to his home in Vermont to see if it would grow, Tucker said. Federal officials have now confiscated it.

Selby officials were caught off guard by the investigation. Then-director Meg Lowman, a rain forest biologist who wrote a critically acclaimed memoir called *Life in the Trees*, was not even in town when Kovach showed up with his orchid.

But she became the orchid's first casualty.

For two years Lowman was the target of repeated sniping from Selby's chairman, a prominent orchid grower named Bob Scully who four years ago was banned from Selby's greenhouses over complaints of sexual harassment and other problems. According to Lowman's attorney, Robert Rivas, Scully was informed by Selby's experts about Kovach's orchid the day after it arrived, and he "enthusiastically endorsed" rushing the news into print, even meeting with the orchid experts to discuss it.

When Selby's board learned of the federal investigation, board members asked Scully to deal with it, said former board member Bob Richardson.

"We were always hopeful this thing was going to blow away," Richardson said. "It just kept escalating as time went on."

Tension among board members escalated, too. For Richardson, the last straw came when "we were sitting in a meeting with the board and Scully was saying he thought Meg hadn't told the truth about what happened."

Richardson quit. He had pledged \$100,000 to Selby, but plans to give it to Lowman for her legal defense. Then Lowman was forced out, along with board members who supported her. Several have vowed to withhold donations worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In Peru, the government posted fliers in the airports warning against smuggling the new orchid. But collectors stripped the site where Kovach's three plants came from, and the plants are selling for \$1,000 each in Europe, said Harold Koopowitz, editor of *Orchid Digest*.

Five months ago, though, Koopowitz saw 1,000 more growing on a remote cliff in the Andes. Their best protection is their location. Getting to them, Koopowitz wrote, required making what he called "the hike from hell."

One person who hopes to profit from this is The Adventurer. When Kovach flew to Selby he left two of his orchids with Moore, who later paid local farmers to gather about 200 more for his nursery. The Moores now await the day when trade in them will be legal and lucrative.

Most people connected to the case declined to comment. Kovach, who initially was talking to the New York Times, Washington Post and People, now refuses all interview requests as he awaits the grand jury's decision.

"My life is ruined," he told People. "The bottom line is, it's just a flower. Everybody's lost their mind."

- Times staff writers Graham Brink and David Adams and researchers Caryn Baird and Cathy Wos contributed to this report.

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