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Tribute to Eric Stein, Archbold's CFO

By ARCHBOLD BIOLOGICAL STATION

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Eric Stein, Chief Financial Officer, at an event at Archbold in 2016.

DEBORAH POLLARD PHOTO

Eric Stein (1957-2021), Archbold Biological Station's Chief Financial Officer for 15 years, passed away in Sebring from complications of COVID-19 on Jan. 13, 2021. Always kind, immensely friendly, forever-smiling, ever-humorous, Eric served as one of the great "unsung heroes" of Archbold, a team member who worked incredibly hard behind the scenes to ensure the financial and fiduciary wheels of the organization ran smoothly.

All Archbold's achievements over these years — science, conservation and education — were underpinned by his skills. He touched the organization in so many ways, playing countless, often unrecognized, roles in all our lives.

For a guy that was not really that interested in science or nature, Eric was nonetheless totally dedicated to Archbold. He took an almost Herculean hard-work approach to his vast range of responsibilities. When interviewing for the job he expressed, "My biggest concern is coming from South Florida's fast-paced banks and companies. Once I've got everything sorted out here, I'm worried I'll get bored." He later admitted, almost ruefully, he had never had a boring day at Archbold. A talented and smart financial manager, he directed the ever-expanding financial operations for Archbold's large and complicated not-for-profit corporation in Venus, Florida.

Always up for a new challenge, he oversaw the finances for everything from scientists' research budgets and their myriad grants, to Archbold's Buck Island Ranch cattle operation, fundraising, lodging and food services, and so much more. He was deeply engaged in innumerable contracts including the construction of Archbold's award-winning LEED® Platinum green building. A terrific negotiator, he always got a good price on anything from a truck, to a phone contract, to purchases of land. Eric's maxim that integrity is paramount, meant that he never favored himself above others, and ensured fairness and honesty throughout. On top of these fundamentals, he loved coming to work at a place where jeans, shorts and flip flops are the daily norm.

Deaf since birth, Eric was transformed by the miracle of his cochlear implant about 20 years ago. It was a measure of his intelligence and positive attitude that he earned a degree in Business Administration / Finance-Accounting in 1979 from the University of Florida, before this cochlear implant, without dispensations or additional help, but by lip-reading and borrowing other's notes. Eric never complained but always explained about hearing loss. At Archbold we were so fortunate to learn from him about accommodating the many challenges faced by those born into a soundless world: buzzy speaker phones, the excruciating wailing in his cochlear implant from wireless sensors installed in new buildings; acoustically reflective surfaces, and of course crowded rooms. He was gleeful at the advent of Zoom — welcoming the technology with headphones for clear sound, every speaker face-to-face facilitating lip reading, and the benefit of speech recognition text scrolling across the bottom of his screen. His palpable delight was almost childlike.

Eric was deeply loyal to friends and colleagues. Messages of condolence are flooding into Archbold and to his family. Once you were a friend of Eric's, you were a friend for life. He was the epitome of bonhomie, embracing everyone's company and enjoying all those he met. Cruising through Archbold's world of science and environmental conversations, Eric had an unnerving, almost uncanny ability to single out and latch onto a fellow sports fanatic. So much the better if they were a fan of any sports team from his alma mater, University of Florida. He was a true Gator! If you supported another team, he never missed an opportunity to remind you that your team had just lost.

Eric's other go-to subject of conversation was always his family, and he would invariably also inquire about your family and their lives. He was inordinately proud of his two daughters, Megan Stein Cantrell, now Lecturer at University of Florida, and the lovable Madison, still in school. After they moved to Highlands County, he supported them in all their endeavors, mostly completely new to him. Born in Brooklyn, New York he had never anticipated that his life as a family man would involve the Future Farmers of America (FFA), daughters raising hogs, state fairs and so on, but he jumped into all that goes with living in a rural community. He was one of the best-loved, and most widely known ambassadors for Archbold in Highlands County, from Seacoast Bank, to the Chamber of Commerce, to the agriculture community.

Eric leaves his wife Gail, his daughters Megan and Madison and son-in law Matthew Cantrell: our love, deepest condolences, thoughts and prayers go out to his family and many friends. He also leaves the entire community of Archbold — staff, board, visitors, volunteers, supporters and beyond — just devastated in the trail of his untimely departure. Farewell Eric, Archbold salutes you as one of our real heroes. You are greatly missed and will be remembered, forever.

Hilary Swain

Archbold Biological Station

Archbold's In Memoriam web page archbold-station.org/html/aboutus/memoriam.html has information on sharing condolences and support with the family and the Archbold community.