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Remembering Dr. Donald Joseph Drapalik

May 28, 2015

The Department of Biology and Georgia Southern University are remembering Dr. Donald Joseph Drapalik, age 80, who passed away on May 22, 2015. Dr. Drapalik received a B.A. degree in Botany from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in 1959, a M.A. in Botany from Southern Illinois University in 1962, and a Ph.D. in Botany from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1970. He had a long and distinguished record of teaching, scholarship, and service to Georgia Southern. Don was hired as an assistant professor in 1968 and retired as a full professor in 2003. As a broadly trained biologist and botanist, Don was “the” expert for plant identification in our region. His identification skills and knowledge of plant distribution made him a valuable resource for colleagues, state and federal agencies, and conservation organizations. Don helped promote the idea of protecting the forested tract on the Georgia Southern campus known as Herty Pines. In collaboration with Emeritus Professor Dr. Frank French, Don’s work resulted in the Herty Nature Preserve, complete with trails and interpretive signs. He single-handedly or with the help of others he recruited, protected populations of threatened plants. He is known for his research program on the rare plant *Elliottia racemosa*, the Georgia plume. Don’s greatest contribution was to develop the Georgia Southern University Herbarium with a collection that now includes 35,000 specimens, a resource that will serve scientists far into the future. Don assisted with the early formation of the Coastal Plain Botanical Garden where he also served on its board of directors. Don’s dedication to professional, departmental and university service was recognized by departmental, college and university service awards. He was active in professional organizations, particularly the Association of Southeastern Biologists and Georgia Academy of Sciences. Students fondly remember him as an outstanding naturalist and inspiring mentor, and Don was a kind, dedicated and caring colleague. Don’s writings and plant collections, coupled with his training students in botany for over 30 years, are the tangible legacy of a life well-lived.



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