

## Gaillard “Gilly” Simmons Anderson

Gaillard “Gilly” Simmons Anderson, 82, died Friday, December 20, 2013 at his home. He is survived by his widow Beverly, his son Mark (Stephenie) and two daughters, Dorothy Simmons Brock and Cindy Simmons, all of Greenwood, SC. Gilly was a graduate of Wofford College, and received his Master’s Degree from Western Carolina University. He served as Head Basketball Coach at T. L Hanna, where his team won the State championships in 1966 and 1967, and he directed summer basketball camps at the YMCA for 24 years. Throughout his lifetime, Gilly was a champion dahlia grower and hybridizer, receiving many honors for his outstanding flowers. He also mentored many other friends and growers, gladly teaching them and sharing his expertise as an exhibitor and gardener. He was a member, deacon and Sunday School teacher at the First Baptist Church. Gilly Simmons started growing dahlias in Anderson, South Carolina in 1961 with 12 tubers. The next year he purchased 40 “dinner plate” sized dahlias at a dollar apiece from a well known grower and exhibitor from Spartanburg, SC. When he brought his blooms to the Dahlia Society of Georgia show for the first time in 1963, he was told they were too good for the novice grower division and he needed to show them in the Open Division. Even though he won numerous blue ribbons that first year, he failed to get any blooms on the Head Table. That would soon change. With mentoring assistance from two of Georgia’s premier dahlia growers, Conrad Faust and Gene Boeke, Gilly rapidly developed his growing, exhibiting, and hybridizing skills.

Over the next 45 years, from his humble “less than one acre” backyard, would come some of the best dahlias the world has or will ever see. Growing conditions for dahlias in Anderson, SC, are not ideal. In fact, they are downright harsh. Gilly would often say, “No one would grow dahlias with the heat, droughts, floods, and insects I have to deal with.” Even though he shared with and mentored countless growers in the area, most gave up after only a season or two. He himself would often have to replant five or more times. “The plants would just burn up.” He soon learned the fine art of propagation. From late winter to mid-summer, he filled his small greenhouse with thousands of dahlia cuttings.

Some he would give away or donate to society plant sales, but all the others he and his wife, Beverly, would plant, plant, and plant again until his yard was filled with dahlias.

In 1986, Gilly and Beverly met with other dedicated North and South Carolina dahlia growers in their living room to form the Carolinas Dahlia Society. With enthusiasm and a lot of hard work, the fledgling society hosted the 26th annual American Dahlia Society National Show in

Asheville, NC, in 1992. Attendees still remember fondly the beautiful southern mountain setting, blooms, and hospitality.

In the mid 90's, Gilly was asked to join the Tennessee Dahlia Society. As with any society, Tennessee was going through some rough times with declining membership. He helped revitalize the society by showing their new members how to grow prize winning dahlias. He also donated countless dahlia tubers to their fundraising efforts.

For decades, Gilly would unfailingly bring “buckets and buckets” of prize winning blooms to fairs and shows throughout the south. Fellow exhibitors would often line up to see his new introductions. Even though he sent many of his introductions to American Dahlia Society trial gardens, he would most often enter them in their respective divisions. “Good enough to compete, good enough to win” was his mantra. And win they did. Of the varieties he eventually kept and disseminated, all won at least best in their class and went to the head table.

Holding offices in all three societies – Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee – as well as a Classification Committee member of the American Dahlia Society, Gilly Simmons has been a driving force in the growing, hybridizing and showing of dahlias in the south and the world. He was honored in 2009 as the first Honoree of the Southern Heritage exhibit.