



# Interiorscape Hall of Fame



## Joe Cialone

2000 Allied Trade Professional

The Cialone farmhouse in Wayne, New Jersey was full - 13 people filled its rooms with love and laughter. A big family, Joe's Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa, then 5 kids, (Joe was number 2), 2 aunts and 2 uncles all lived and worked together. Preceded by his sister Carmela, Joe was added to the family on Dec 31, 1936. The proud parents, Carmine and Antoinette Madonna Cialone added brothers Phil and Paul and then daughter, Frances.

The 43-acre Cialone brothers' farm produced vegetables for the New Jersey Market. Everyone helped bring in the crops, so the boys' horticultural training started early. By the age of 15 there wasn't a piece of equipment or a job unfamiliar to the brothers. Joe was the first person in his family to go to college. Joe's uncles believed that the family should help with forwarding the educational goals of the children. With their help Joe entered Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The price of education was weekdays at the college and weekends back home working the farm, making sure the family did not have to hire any additional manpower to get the produce to market. Joe's routine continued until his graduation, thus setting the precedent for the other brothers. Joe and Lenore were married in 1958, his Junior year at Rutgers. The next year was a momentous one for Joe. He graduated with honors on the dean's list with a B.S. in Horticulture and became a father of their first child, Janet. Lenore and Joe grew their family adding Susan in 1961, Joey in 1962 and Marie in 1965.

During graduate school at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, Joe's studies concentrated on Weed Science in crop vegetables. His position as plant physiologist at the Virginia Truck Experiment Station in Painter, Va. permitted him to continue his research. During this time Joe wrote and had several papers published. Joe's fame grew and he became known as the "chief weed man" for the state of New Jersey. By 1967 he had completed his studies and had earned his PhD. He was offered an associate professorship in weed science at Rutgers University. Although primarily a research position, he was still

required to teach both graduate and undergraduate courses while supervising graduate students. Joe loved teaching and all was well. Then in 1970 brother Phil called with an opportunity to unite the second generation of Cialone brothers, Phil, Paul and Joe, in a family business. Phil asked Joe if he would quit his tenured teaching position and forfeit the free college tuition for his children to Rutgers to go into business together. Five acres of greenhouses in Florida and a greenhouse called Tropic Greenhouses in New Jersey was for sale. In June 1971 the Brothers Cialone again united when they bought Tropical Ornamentals, Inc. and Tropic Greenhouses.

In the beginning, all of the plants grown by Phil on the 5 Florida acres were trucked to Tropic Greenhouses in New Jersey to be sold. In one year the brothers shipped 48 loads of plants from Florida to Joe in New Jersey. These were the expansion years of the 70's. The operation grew; the brothers bought nurseries in New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Florida, providing both production and distribution locations for foliage and flowering plants.

Paul left the threesome in the early 80's and went out on his own. In 1983 the New Jersey greenhouses were sold and Joe and son Joey moved down to Florida. By 1986 Tropical Ornamentals had expanded to 5 locations and almost 100 acres in Del Ray Beach, Florida. It was during this time that Joe developed the "Notched Cane" method of pruning the stems of *Dracaena Fragrans* and *Massangeana* cane that cause lateral bud breaks along their stems. He was also busy inventing and developing an inexpensive sub-irrigation system for the interiorscape industry known as the "Everlife Sub-irrigation System."

By 1995 Joe and Phil decided to retire...just a little. Joe and son Joey bought out Phil's interest in Tropical Ornamentals and moved the operation to 35 acres in Lake Worth, Florida, with a new emphasis on *Aglaonemas* and other low light plants as their main crop. In that same year, Joe and Tom Creeden launched their partnership, Tropical Computers, Inc., a company specializing in producing plant and plant related images on CD-ROM for the interiorscape industry.

Joe's enthusiasm and activism are legendary, he has served on the boards of the Florida Foliage Association, the Florida Nurseryman and Growers Association, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, Mounts Botanical Garden, Palm Beach Wholesale Growers Association, the National Foliage Foundation, and The Fund for Interior Horticultural Research and Education.

Joe's dedication to education keeps him involved in speaking at industry conferences around the US and the world. Over the years he has logged many miles traveling to speak in Canada, Europe, and Australia. Joe spoke at the first Ohio Short Course Interiorscape session in 1979. Still frequently seen on the program of the Mid Atlantic Interiorscape Conference, Joe's retirement has yet to slow him down.

The Florida Nurseryman and Growers Association inducted Joe into The Foliage Hall of Fame in 1995, followed in 1997 with the Wendell Butler Award - Nurseryman of the Year. The Palm Beach, Wholesale Growers Association awarded Joe the "Jim Lufts Industry Service Award" in 1999.

Joe and his quick smile will be seen throughout 2000 as he serves as the President of the Florida Nurseryman and Growers Association and also as president of the Mounts Botanical Garden in Palm Beach, Florida.

Enthusiasm for learning and teaching, along with a tenacious dedication to the marketing and promotion of the Green Industry are the legacies Joe gives those who follow. He will always be remembered as the man who is making the world a better place with plants, flowers and a ready smile.

In case you are wondering...the land around the farmhouse was sold but the farmhouse still stands and Grandma Antoinette is enjoying her memories in the home in which she raised her family.

