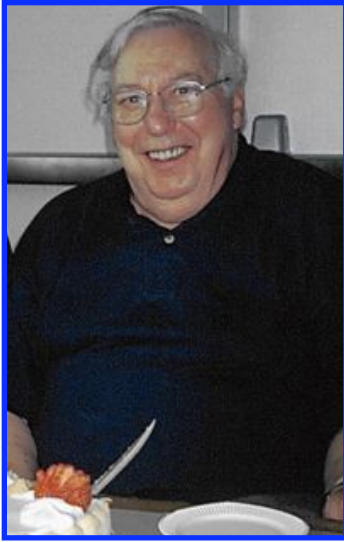


# Remembering Paul Gilmet

Article written by Paul's friend and our own Julie Francke.

Paul Gilmet, “The Orchid Man” of Meijer Gardens, co-founder of Grand Valley Orchid Society, gourmet cook, cherished father and grandfather, and friend to so many, passed away on September 9, 2009.



I first met Paul on a cold, January day in 1995. He knew we were starting an orchid collection at Meijer Gardens and sensed we could use a hand. This former Marine sergeant did not ask if I needed help, he told me that he would help. He would acquire plants for the collection and maintain them for the first two years. How could I possibly say no? Paul reported to work seven days a week. Opera music coming from “greenhouse 3” was a sure sign that “The Orchid Man” was in. While Paul spent a great deal of time behind the scenes watering, repotting, and pampering the orchids, he frequently visited the tropical conservatory. Here he would check on the orchids displayed on the Orchid Wall and greet visitors with a smile. His lovebird often accompanied him as Paul spent time chatting with visitors and answering their questions. On occasion,

he brought them back to the greenhouse; some left with a division of a plant; all left with a smile. Paul made people feel special. Members of his “fan club” frequently sent him cards, photos of their orchids, and letters. Paul shared some of these letters with me, which gave me better insight into what he was really up to! I’ve included a few below.

Many of you discovered another of Paul’s talents—as a gourmet cook. He loved making big Sunday dinners for his family and frequently made deliciously rich desserts to share with the staff and volunteers. Lots of real butter, sugar and chocolate went into his most decadent creations. At Orchid Show potlucks, the most frequently asked question was “What dessert did Paul bring?” Those who were lucky enough to get a piece knew that his creations were not for those on a diet. They were not for cooks in a hurry, either. He shared his favorite recipes in several cookbooks he gave to his family and friends.



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Paul's work at Meijer Gardens went well beyond the two years he originally promised. For nine more years Paul "renewed his contract" annually. In 2006, Paul retired, and by this time he had shared his knowledge, tips and tricks with a number of very hard working volunteers he affectionately called his "seedlings." They know what Paul meant when he revealed that "You can't grow orchids without pantyhose," or why he described his orchid-growing hobby as "a disease." When he retired, Paul had recorded 12,045 hours (the highest ever achieved); built the orchid collection to 3,000 orchids (including many rescued orchids); garnered a loyal group of volunteers, made many very special friends, and made many more feel very special.

### *A Sampling of "Fan Mail":*

#### A Staff Member:

I wanted to tell you that we all appreciate all that you do for the Gardens. Your knowledge and energy in the orchid department goes without saying. The extras, like your smile and the delicious goodies that you bring us are also greatly appreciated. You are a treasure!



#### From Sightseer Radio:

Thank you for sharing your time with the listeners at Sightseer Radio. For them it was another window in their world to the outside, and describing the growing and care of the exotic orchid plants in Meijer Gardens was an interesting topic. Your contribution to the Gardens is certainly a significant one and those of us who visit there are appreciative.

#### Northern Michigan Orchid Society:

A note of thanks for devoting your Sunday afternoon to our small group. We all enjoyed the tour very much.



#### Happy Visitors:

I picked up my orchid yesterday afternoon and have it home again after your "doctoring." Thank you so much for your help and I'll follow the tips you gave me. If it flowers (or when it flowers) I'll show you the results of your advice.

Such a delight to have met you! Our sincere thanks for the personal tour. I'll look you up on our next visit.