



Remembering Richard Cavender 3/7/42 — 1/17/22

From the Willamette Club Newsletter, the following is an article from the May 2014 *Garden Time Magazine* written by Judy Alleruzzo.

#### LOVE STORY

### **Karen and Red Cavender are smitten with azaleas, rhododendrons...and each other.**

In the Portland area there is a huge fan club for rhododendrons and azaleas, I think the leaders of the pack are 'Red' (Dick) and Karen Cavender. The love of these plants goes way back in their lives. They have been members of the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society since 1969 and also volunteer at Crystal Springs

and Cecil and Molly Smith Garden. Karen and Red are fixtures at the two gardens tirelessly helping to plant and prune, give tours and organize plant sales. I'm sure these are just a few of their 'jobs'.

The love story of Karen and Red Cavender and their discovery of rhodies and azaleas is a great tale. They started dating after meeting at a dance organized by their local Masonic lodge.

Red didn't want to go but since he was an officer in the Masonic Youth Group, he was expected to attend. Little did he know he would meet his soul mate, Karen.

After high school, they both attended Portland State. Red asked Karen to marry him during a dinner date at The London Bar & Grill in The Benson Hotel. She said yes and they have celebrated 51 engagement anniversaries at the Grill.

So this is all a beautiful love story but what about the plants you ask? Well I'm getting to that but call me a sentimentalist; I had to tell that story first.

On Karen and Red's first vacation as a married couple, they went on a road trip to the Oregon coast. During the trip, they drove by a blooming shrub growing by the side of the road.

Red pulled over and they got out to look at the flowers. The blooms were white and fragrant with a clove-like scent. The roadside shrub intrigued Red enough to try to find the name of the plant. They stopped at a nearby nursery hoping they would know the name.

Red asked, "What is the shrub blooming along the roadside with the fragrant white flowers?"

The nursery owner said. "What do you want with that weed?"

Red and Karen were smitten by the plant that turned out to be *Rhododendron occidentale*. It is the deciduous native azalea, found on the west coast of North America from British Columbia, Canada to

northern California. And so began the Cavender's love of azaleas and rhododendrons....

Red's nursery business, Red's Rhodies, is based on a "hobby that got way out of control". (I have heard that excuse for starting a nursery business from many a plant grower.)

Red just loves to play bee and make new and improved varieties of *R. occidentale*, his favorite azalea. He cross pollinates blooms just as "bees do it", but in a more organized way to produce seed for new varieties. He grows the seedlings to mature flowering shrubs in his large test plot. He then evaluates these new seedling shrubs to see if any are great plants to register and grow for the gardening market. One of Red's ongoing breeding programs is to produce large double flowers of the NW native *Rhododendron occidentale*.

Another breeding program was to cross the fragrant *R. occidentale* with the late flowering native Eastern Azaleas, *R. bakerii* and *R. calendulaceum*. . . .

The Cavender's have lived in Sherwood since 1979. The property is about 5 acres, with 2.5 acres in an extensive garden with another 2 acres set aside for Red's trial gardens and greenhouses. When Karen and Red moved onto the property, there was only 1 rhody and 3 azaleas.

At the last census in 2000, the Cavenders were up to 1000 species and hybrids of rhodies and azaleas, 12 magnolias and assorted maples and flowering trees. Red is excited to say he has a rhody or azalea in bloom from Christmas time through July when a few azaleas are still in flower!

A family of quail, Karen's favorite bird, live on the property. They have become the mascot of the garden and are also found in artwork inside the house. Their front door inset is a colorful stained glass scene of a quail in a garden. Other artwork adorns the house and garden including metal quail, stone frogs and a copper water wheel that spins during rainstorms and garden irrigation. Whimsey abounds in the Cavender garden.

Of his sweetheart, Red says, “their garden and nursery would not be possible without Karen as she feeds, clothes and generally takes care of me”. A big job for Karen as she is also busy with her volunteerism and driving her new “pony”, a deep blue Ford Mustang. She knows how to have fun. . . .

Karen and Red Cavender have received accolades from the many plant societies they belong to. Red has received medals for plants he has bred and they both have received commendations for their years of service in those groups. People like Karen and Red can never be thanked enough for the work they do to promote rhodies and azaleas. They have a passion for these plants and enjoy life. They just want to pass their love of gardening to all!

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The Cavenders generously supported many local ARS organizations with their time and talents. Richard and Karen have been members of the American Rhododendron Society since 1969. Dick is a Life Member of Portland Chapter, and is an Associate Member of the Tualatin Valley and Willamette Chapters. Dick and Karen are long-time supporters of the Cecil & Molly Smith Garden and also serve on that garden committee. The Cavenders have travelled world-wide making many friends who share their passion for plants.

Dick has served as Treasurer and President of Portland Chapter and Director of District. 4. He was honored with the Silver Medal from the American Rhododendron Society and the Bronze Medal from the Portland Chapter.

Their garden was open for many tours and club parties. February was their favorite time to bring the various clubs St. Valentine’s Day treats and door prizes reflecting the love they shared for the organizations.

On the Tualatin Valley Chapter website, there is a tour of their garden. Click on Members Gardens tab . . . . [tualatinvalleyars.org](http://tualatinvalleyars.org)

There are no services planned for Dick at this time, however, there is the possibility of a memorial gathering sometime in the future.

Donations in Dick's memory are requested to either the Smith Garden or Crystal Springs Garden. Please make your check out to the **Portland Chapter ARS** with a notation to which garden and in memory of/honor of Dick Cavender. Please mail your check to:

Portland Chapter ARS,  
c/o Cavender  
15920 SW Oberst Lane  
Sherwood, OR 97140

And if you would like to send a card to Karen Cavender, please mail it to:

Karen Cavender  
15920 SW Oberst Lane  
Sherwood, OR 97140



