PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

LADISLAUS CUTAK, A PHENOMENAL MAN

"I am a dreamer and the funny part of it is that most of my dreams have come true. "—Lad Cutak

Ladislaus Cutak, a warm, friendly, sincere, and fun loving man, enjoyed a good time and liked to see others happy. He was a person who loved life, people, and plants and wrote about them convincingly, delightfully, and diligently for 39 years.

Ladislaus Theophine Cutak was born May 27, 1908, in Austria. His family emigrated to the U.S. in 1912, settling in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the eldest of six children, four sisters and one brother, who was the youngest. The initial family home was in the old French Quarter near the home and office of Frederick Adolphus Wislizenus (1810 - 1899), an M. D., explorer, botanist, and cactologist.

The great St. Louis hailstorm of 1927 gave Lad his first toehold on a horticulture career. Joseph Cutak, Lad's father, worked at the Missouri Botanical Garden, and needed an extra hand to help clean up the mess left by the storm. Lad began working there on May 4, 1927, at 19. (Joseph died February 20, 1946, at 63, having spent 32 years at the Garden.) By 1933, Lad was curator of the main conservatory, which housed the exotic plants. The following year, he was put in charge of a range of greenhouses at the Garden. At that time, there were only 138 named species of succulents at the Garden, but by 1941 the number soared to 1300. Lad and his father were inseparable companions in work at the Garden for 19 years.

Lad founded the Henry Shaw Cactus Society in July 1942 and served as its president for many years. He also served as president of the St. Louis Horticultural Society, and was in charge of laying out the plans for the original and celebrated Climatron, the first of its kind. He was greenhouse superintendent of the Garden until 1965 when he became manager of public relations. In addition to cacti and succulents, Lad had an avid interest in bromeliads, aroids, aquatics, and ornamental trees and shrubs. He traveled more than 100,000 miles, botanizing in the U.S., Mexico, Central America, and South America.

He described many plants, among them being Coryphantha ramillosa from the Big Bend of Texas (1942), and Mammillaria theresae (1967).

Lad was very much an integral part of the first CSSA cactus convention held in St. Louis in 1941 and a later one held there in 1959, and many other conventions as well. In January 1941, he became one of the first CSSA Fellows; he was honored as a writer, explorer, and horticulturist.


40(6), 1968. He illustrated some of them with his own cartoons.

Lad's first book, *Cactus Guide*, was published in March 1956. It demonstrated a nice, chatty way of writing. More than 170 of the important cultivated species of cacti are identified and classified; the book was reprinted in 1976. Lad wrote and illustrated his only other book, *Cactus Personified, Laughs with Facts*, published in 1959. Wrote he, "I lay no claim of being a professional artist yet to amuse myself I have attempted to picture cactus plants to the things they put me in mind of."

He presented numerous programs to garden clubs, civic, religious, and social organization throughout the U.S. These did not go unnoticed. In 1968, he received the prestigious St. Louis Newspaper Guild's Page One Civic Award. And in 1969, he led a tour through South America, the first trip sponsored by the Garden.

Lad died on January 18, 1973, at 65, a victim of cancer. •

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