



Carl F. Gortzig

May 6, 1931 – June 2, 2018

Carl F. Gortzig '52, professor emeritus and chair of the former Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, died June 2, 2018 at the Oak Hill Nursing home in Ithaca. He was 87. Dr. Gortzig was a scholar, leader, advisor, and supporter of arts, culture, and athletics.

As department chair, Professor Gortzig was highly respected for his vision and leadership, and his advocacy on behalf of the field of floriculture and ornamental horticulture. As expressed by Dean Emeritus of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences David L. Call, “Carl was the most cooperative, compassionate, and hard-working department chair in the college. He was a pleasure to work with.”

Professor Gortzig was also a strong believer in the three roles of the department and the college. “Carl not only championed excellence in research and teaching,” stated former senior extension associate Joann Gruttadaurio, “but he truly valued and guided our cooperative extension program.”

Professor Gortzig’s liaison role with industry leaders led to mutual respect, strong relationships and support that carried on for many years and continues today. His understanding of the scope of New York’s horticulture and turf industries as well as the need for research was at the heart of the Cornell’s land-grant mission. According to Dr. Marty Petrovic, Professor Emeritus of Turfgrass Science at Cornell, “Carl led the efforts to establish and expand the Cornell’s Turfgrass Program. During Carl’s tenure the Turfgrass Foundation was established with the New York State Turfgrass Association. This partnership produced funds that continued to support the research, teaching and extension programs in New York. His vision and support led to the growth of one of the most successful academic turfgrass programs in the country.”

Professor Gortzig’s own research covered floriculture economics and marketing. He worked closely with flower growers in New York State, and with the faculty in the former Department of Agricultural, Resource and Managerial Economics, including the late Dana Goodrich,

distinguished professor emeritus. According to senior extension associate in the Dyson School of Business Tom Maloney, “Carl Gortzig understood the importance of sound business practices to the success of horticultural firms. He also served as mentor to many extension educators and specialists across New York State.”

George Schaefer, owner of Schaefer’s Gardens in Triangle, New York reflected on Professor Gortzig’s contribution to the industry: “Carl always got the job done. He respected input from industry leaders and responded quickly to industry needs. Our professional relationship grew into a cherished long-term friendship with both Carl and Jean.” George Schichtel of Schichtel’s Nursery in Springville, New York added, “Carl and I both graduated from Michigan State University. During the start of my nursery production business Carl was often called upon and was extremely helpful in problem solving production issues.”

In recognition of his multiple industry roles, in 1989 Professor Gortzig received the George L. Good Gold Medal of Horticulture, the highest honor of the New York State Nursery and Landscape Association, given annually “to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to horticulture in the State of New York.”

Professor Gortzig also cared deeply about the students he taught and advised. This caring was never more evident than during Joanna Beitel’s senior year in 1992, when her father became seriously ill and Carl made sure she could graduate early and get home before her dad passed away. In recognition of that kindness, Joanna and her spouse, David, endowed the Carl F. Gortzig Scholarship which is awarded annually to a deserving student in CALS. Another former student, Jamie Edelstein, credits Professor Gortzig with transforming him from a freshman struggling with a learning disability to his senior year when he graduated with honors.

Professor Gortzig also served as the Elizabeth Newman Wilds Director of Cornell Plantations (now Cornell Botanic Gardens) from 1993–1995, after a previous stint as acting director in 1989, and four years as chair of the Plantations Advisory Board from 1980–1984. Throughout his involvement, he devoted himself to the further development of the collections, the conservation mission, and educational roles of the Plantations, and oversaw the development of the Cornell Plantations Path, among other significant accomplishments.

Professor Gortzig displayed his love of community by assisting several local organizations, including chairing the boards of the History Center in Tompkins County, the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, and the Tompkins County Public Library. He and his wife, Jean, were also longtime season ticket holders for Cornell men’s basketball home games, and on numerous occasions entertained members of the team at their home for sumptuous dinners. Matt Braun, who served as director of the History Center during Carl’s tenure on the board, shared that “Carl was a true role model who revealed his gifts to me with care, compassion, generosity, trust, and commitment. He guided and molded me at a time in my life and career when I absolutely needed that.”

In reflecting on Professor Gortzig’s life, Don Rakow MPS ’77, Ph.D. ’87 and associate professor in the Section of Horticulture stated, “In a period where basic civility is daily being challenged, Carl Gortzig was a true gentleman; he treated all people with respect, regardless of their role. He

was devoted to the field of floriculture, to Cornell, and to his beloved wife, Jean.” And former senior extension associate Bob Kozlowski shared that “Carl leaves a cherished legacy to the field of horticulture and the Cornell community.”

Carl F. Gortzig served in the United States Army as a first lieutenant from 1952 to 1954; taught biology, botany and math at the McKinley Vocational High School in Buffalo from 1954 to 1955; worked as an Erie County associate agricultural agent from 1955 to 1964; and was employed by Cornell’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences as an admissions counselor from 1957 to 1958. He joined Cornell’s faculty in 1965, earned tenure in 1971 and was promoted to full professor in 1978.

He was a member of the American Society for Horticulture Science, International Society for Horticultural Science, American Horticulture Society, Society of American Florists, New York Florists’ Club, International Plant Propagators Society and an honorary member of the New York State Flower Industries.

He is survived by his devoted wife of 55 years, Jean.

Written by Donald A. Rakow (chair) and Joann Gruttadaurio