

Good Day to all! Did you know the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Hibiscus Festival is coming up May 5, 6, and 7, in Gilchrist Park? Visit [thehibiscusfestival.com](http://thehibiscusfestival.com) for details. Consequently, here is my associated column on one of Punta Gorda's and Charlotte County's most colorful "favorite sons."

Punta Gorda has not only been proclaimed the hibiscus city twice, but is also the birthplace of a world-renowned hibiscus hybridizer. In 1926, the city council first passed an ordinance proclaiming Punta Gorda as "The City of Hibiscus." In conjunction with the proclamation, 2,200 red hibiscuses were ordered and planted throughout the city, which apparently made quite an impression on native son Harry Goulding, known as "Pete" to everyone in town.

Pete's dad, Joseph, had moved to Punta Gorda from North Carolina in 1895, intent on harvesting egret plumes in the Everglades. At the time a sought-after complement to ladies' hats, they were literally "worth their weight in gold." Soon after his arrival though, the market dissolved when their use became illegal. Joseph however, fortunately for us, decided to stay, becoming a commercial fisherman. Not too long afterward, in 1908, Harry was born.

Brought up in the business, Pete began as a "footer," whose job was moving a large gill net's loose end ("foot") to shore once fish were driven into the open net. The net's other end already being anchored to shore. Soon he began keeping the records for Captain Joe's fishing operation, going on to become a bookkeeper, and eventually vice-president and secretary of the Punta Gorda Fish Company, one of five located on the railroad dock at the foot of King Street (U.S. 41 north) in the 1920's. Pete loved the fishing industry, but his passion became hibiscus hybridization.

He and his wife Reba, who grew up across the river in Charlotte Harbor, resided in a small "board and batten" cottage, still standing albeit subsequent additions, on West Retta Esplanade. The story goes that in the early 1930s, Pete travelled throughout the state, gathering samples of the 12 hibiscus varieties growing in Florida. From that stock, in his backyard, he developed many of those seen today, with almost 500 registered varieties to his credit.

Pete was also what some might call a "character" and a great storyteller with sharp wit, evidenced by some of the names bestowed on his creations; Hokey Pokee, Peeping Tom, Mini Skirt, Sleeping Single and Honey Do. He especially enjoyed messing with "out-of-towners" visiting him when they would inquire about his name, Harry, or Pete? He would respond, "My full name is Pedro Pathiro Patholo Guatemala Gouchinhimier Diaz Goulding," and then grin mischievously as they tried to write it all down.

Known internationally as "Mr. Hibiscus" and "King Harry," Pete was visited by hibiscus aficionados from around the world hoping to learn his techniques. His "hobby" garnered him hundreds of awards at flower shows and the American Hibiscus Society proclaimed his blooms "Best in the World" five times. The Society's local entity, the Harry Goulding Chapter, is named in his honor. On July 6, 1988, the city council, recognizing the accomplishments of Punta Gorda's native son, proclaimed Harry Goulding Day and in 2000, the council reaffirmed Punta Gorda's status as "The City of Hibiscus." Next time you are walking downtown, check out trash receptacles on the street sporting a hibiscus bloom on each side.

Pete passed away in 1993 leaving the city, state, and world a more beautiful place. Fortunately, there are several practitioners in southwest Florida continuing his legacy. You can see some of Harry's creations at the Punta Gorda History Park on Shreve Street, look on the right side of the Cigar Cottage, and view photographs of Harry "Pete" Goulding by visiting Charlotte County Libraries and History online. Click on "Physical Items," then "Archive Search" and enter the subject of your search on the "Search" line.

You can also view a photograph of Pete with his signature "air conditioned" pith helmet at the Punta Gorda History Center's website. Select "Online Collection," then "Keyword Search" and enter the subject of your search.

Check out History Services' yearlong project, "Telling Your Stories: History in the Parks." It began in January 2021 with placement of the first interpretive sign "Charlotte Harbor Spa" at South County Regional Park. The last was dedicated December 15, 2021 at Centennial Park featuring Florida postcards. All dedicated signs can be viewed at online library resources. Select "Programs and Services," then "History Services" and "Virtual Programs." Visit the same site and select "History Exhibits" to find out what history related programs and videos are available.

"Did You Know" appears, typically, every other Wednesday, courtesy of this newspaper and the Charlotte County Historical Society. The Society's mission is to advocate and support local history through education, initiatives, and projects in Charlotte County. We are also always looking for volunteers and interested individuals to serve as board members. If you believe our area's history is as important as we do, please visit Charlotte County Historical Center Society online, or call 941.769.1270 for more information.

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