

Annual volunteer award goes to Alice Thomas

Alice Frost Thomas, the Department's Volunteer of the Year, first became involved with the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum more than two decades ago. In 1967 she responded to a plea by Maria Stewart, wife of then-director Dr. William Stewart, for volunteers to help in the historical area.

"I was the only one drafted that way, Mrs. Thomas recalls. "We took field trips to learn what other groups were doing in forming volunteer organizations and in historical preservation...I eventually became the first president because no one else would take the job," she continues with her typical self-effacing humor.

This small group of women who called themselves "Las Voluntarias" cared for the restored buildings at the Arboretum. Soon they began to give historical tours for school children, later diversifying to include information about plants. By the time Mrs. Thomas passed the leadership to Margaret Griffin-Jones in 1969, the group had grown to 30 members. The next year she chaired the first Baldwin Bonanza plant sale to raise funds for the Arboretum.

In 1970 she was elected to the California Arboretum Foundation Board of Trustees. During her next three years as membership chair the Foundation increased from 700 members in 1970 to more than 3,000 in 1973.

Mrs. Thomas was elected the first woman president of the Foundation in 1972. After a busy year that included the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Foundation and the Arboretum, family obligations called her away from the Arboretum and eventually Southern California. When she returned in 1986, Mrs. Thomas was again elected president and headed the Foundation for another four years. The Board of Trustees has changed a great deal under Mrs. Thomas' leadership.

"No longer is it a caretaker's job," she says. "All trustees must be involved in one or more committees and are expected to make a contribution to the capital campaign."

Although Mrs. Thomas emphasizes teamwork among Board members, her modesty dissolves when she talks of the cooperation she fostered among the Department gardens. A new Patron of the Gardens or Four Garden Express Card that she proposed entitles members who purchase a special membership in any one garden to visit the other three free.

In 1986 Mrs. Thomas led the Foundation in funding a feasibility study and master plan for the future development of the Arboretum. Beverly Rouse was hired as development director and a fund raising program was initiated. In the next three years the Foundation's revenue increased almost 90 percent—from \$814,592 in 1985 to \$1.5 million in 1989. With a new orchid greenhouse com-



Alice Thomas (center) receives scrolls from Mrs. George Deukmejian and Supervisor Deane Dana at the Los Angeles County volunteer recognition luncheon.

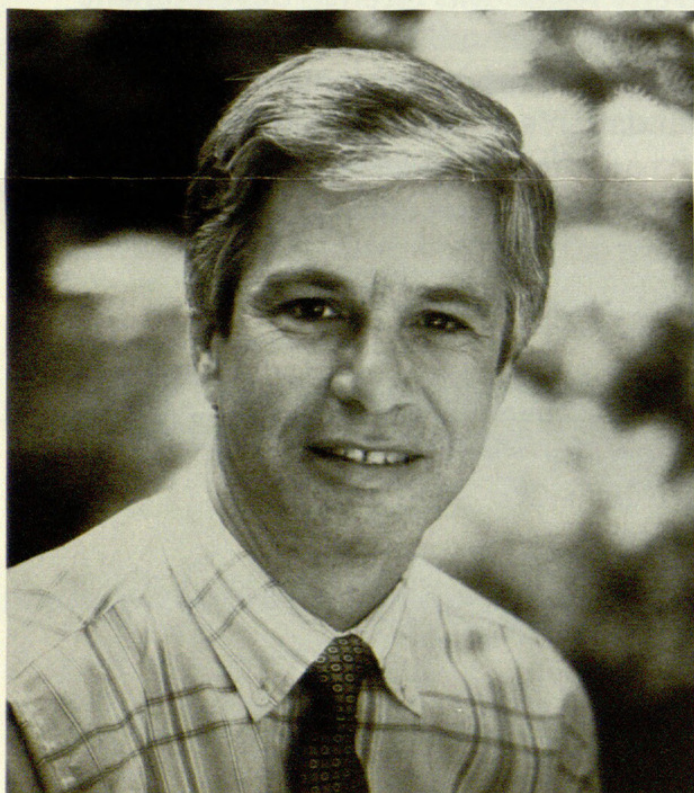
pleted and renovation of the Peacock Cafe underway, the Foundation is now raising funds for a \$4 million Education, Library and Research facility.

When Mrs. Thomas assesses her continuing dedication to Arboretum projects, her

New Superintendent named for Descanso Gardens

Dr. Steven Cohan has been appointed Superintendent of Descanso Gardens, effective July 1. Dr. Cohan has served as Acting Superintendent for the past two months, replacing George Lewis who retired after 19 years at the garden.

Dr. Cohan was chosen for the position following a nationwide search that attracted 22 applicants. Seven finalists from across the country were interviewed by a selection



Dr. Steven Cohan

committee which included Dr. Mildred Mathias, Director Emeritus of the UCLA botanical garden. Dr. Cohan emerged as the top candidate.

"It's a pleasure to appoint someone of Dr. Cohan's calibre," said Leon G. Arnold, Acting Director of the Department of Arboreta and

words apply to the future as well as the past. "Perhaps it is a symbiotic relationship that I have with LASCA," she says. "If I have contributed to it, LASCA has contributed enormously to the quality of my life and that of other County residents."

Botanic Gardens. "I'm sure he will provide Descanso Gardens with outstanding leadership qualities and a personal cooperative attitude."

Dr. Cohan joined the Department last year as Assistant Superintendent at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum in Arcadia. His impact on that facility was immediate and important, Mr. Arnold said. In addition to his regularly assigned management responsibilities he developed an outline for a formalized garden maintenance training program and an activities outline for the summer internship program.

As Superintendent of Descanso Gardens Dr. Cohan plans to emphasize youth programs, water conservation classes for homeowners and the role wildlife plays in the garden's environment.

Before joining the Department, Dr. Cohan spent four years directing a plant breeding research program for a commercial seed company, two years on the faculty of Cal Poly Pomona, seven years as owner and operator of a commercial nursery and one and a half years as Horticultural Director of Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.

Dr. Cohan has also written a series of garden books and conducted garden programs on radio. He is affiliated with several local and national professional organizations.

After receiving a Bachelor of Science in horticulture from Iowa State University, he earned a Masters of Science degree in horticulture and a PhD in plant genetics from Pennsylvania State University.

Dr. Cohan lives in Upland with his wife Diane, and their two children, ages 11 and 16.



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