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(Special to the Citrus Chronicle)

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**CITRUS COUNTY ORCHID COLLECTOR HAS THRIVING PLANT
WITH OVER 750 BLOOMS**

Carol Wilkes, a Homosassa Florida resident, has had a long history as an avid orchid collector but her current and spectacular blooming Dendrobium Gatton Sunray plant now has well over 750 blooms in a Spring display that has friends, neighbors, and plant experts talking about this amazing plant.

Stretching eight feet wide and over four feet tall, the Dendrobium Gatton Sunray that Carol started from a very small cutting (called a KEIKI in orchid terminology) that she received from Dorothy and Ted Sakamoto in 1999 in Kailua Hawaii where Carol was stationed at the time working in the U.S. federal government with NSA.

The plant has grown steadily over 21 years and its resiliency is incredible having lived through moves from Hawaii to Pasadena, Maryland, and finally to Homosassa in 2004. While in Maryland, it lived for two years under lights in a basement that was heated by a wood burning stove.

The Dendrobium Gatton Sunray was hybridized and named by Sir Jeremiah Colman in 1919. Colman's Mustard is a staple in the pantries throughout England still today. It's considered a primary hybrid, a cross between two species dendrobium orchids—pulchellum X illustre. This hybrid holds awards from the American Orchid Society and England's Royal Horticultural Society. The plant now in Homosassa comes directly from a first generation plant and in Homosassa it has survived after 3 back-to-back hurricanes and others since in Carol's orchid house in the Mason Creek area of Homosassa.

Carol Wilkes said, "The Dendrobium Gatton Sunray still shows incredible growth and flowering power. 2019 saw 607 flowers and this year already over 750 and still counting.

The plant for most of the year looks like a wild child in my orchid house—then every Spring comes the beautiful display of blooms. It is grown in a large plastic milk crate that every year needs to be enlarged. I have hundreds of orchids in my collection—but none are as spectacular and as large as this one.”

Carol continued, “Each year when it starts it’s bloom display I bring it out to our patio and each year we are rewarded with more dramatic yellow and burgundy blooms than the year before.”

Carol and her husband Frank have lived far and wide with her active career with NSA, where she spent her first 31 years. She supported multiple directors in her career, with the highlight being her assignment with the intelligence directorate of the US Central Command located at MacDill Air Force Base.

Her priority after retirement from CENTCOM was to keep her prized orchid collection in top form. The success of her Dendrobium Gattou Sunray and her patience with the sensitive orchid over its lifetime is an example of this success.

Carol said, “This orchid is special to our family and Frank and I treasure it as we enjoy the annual blossoms. It should remain in bloom for months and we look at it constantly from our porch and enjoy it more each year.”

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Photo attachments:

Carol Wilkes with her orchid

Orchid single bloom close-up

Orchid multiple blooms on one stalk