

UF Graduates First Ornamental Horticulture Student From 3-Year-Old Ft. Lauderdale Program

by DARCY MEEKER

GAINSVILLE — A Plantation Key native became the first graduate of the University of Florida's off-campus ornamental horticulture degree program recently.

Susan Sprunt, 24, graduating with honors, earned her bachelor of science degree in ornamental horticulture at the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center, a branch of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS).

"It was great," said Ms. Sprunt, who has a job waiting for her at Dale Baldwin & Associates landscaping architecture firm in Tavernier. "You get incredible attention — have small classes from people doing research on their subject. Plus, most of the students are professional nurserymen, so it's like having a lot of teachers."

Over 150 people have enrolled in one or more classes since the program was launched in 1985. There are 33 students now enrolled; their average age is 36.

"The best thing about this program is the students," said Dr. Stephen Verkade, coordinator of the IFAS degree program in Ft. Lauderdale. "Many drive one or two hours to class, and most take two or three classes a week. They are a dedicated bunch."



Susan Sprunt

The students take 10 courses at IFAS research stations in Ft. Lauderdale or Homestead — Environmental Factors, Cultural Factors, Foliage and Nursery Plant Production, Entomology, Soils, Culture and Production of Aquatic Plants, Horticultural Taxonomy, Plant Propagation and a seminar course.

The rest of the courses to meet the University of Florida degree requirements are offered by Florida Atlantic and Florida International Universities.

Ms. Sprunt designed a low-maintenance, native plant landscape for Dr. Kennedy Homes, a Ft. Lauderdale housing project, for her senior project.

Her parents are Sandy Sprunt, research director for the National Audubon Society on Plantation Key, and Donna Sprunt, who owns "Florida Keys Native Tree Nursery" in Tavernier.

The next off-campus ornamental horticulture student is expected to graduate in December 1988. ■

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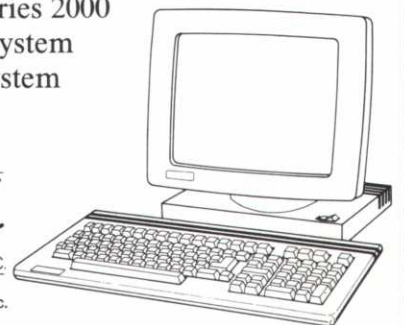
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