

FAIRPLEX

Longtime Fairplex, LA County Fair Horticulturist Retires After 30 Years ***A Claremont resident, Don DeLano was instrumental in creating The Farm at Fairplex***

In nearly 50 years in horticulture, Don DeLano has been many things: lecturer, landscaper, farmer, teacher, floral designer. He even assisted actor Raymond Burr (*Perry Mason* and *Ironside*) create an orchid nursery donation to Cal Poly Pomona from the actor's famed orchid gardens.

But perhaps his greatest professional milestone is assisting in the creation of the five-acre urban farm at Fairplex – The Farm at Fairplex – which has served to teach millions of guests of the LA County Fair and thousands of local students on field trips about agriculture, sustainable farming, the farm to table movement and crops native to California.

“The Farm at Fairplex has become something the Fair is known for. People want to see it, they love having dinner out here, they’ve loved the field trips and events we’ve held out here,” said DeLano. “The Farm is a hub for learning.”

After 30 years as Fairplex's horticulturist, DeLano is hanging up his trowel, retiring in November. “I have six grandchildren – I want to spend more time with them.”

DeLano, a Claremont resident for 35 years, also looks forward to spending his days with his wife, Becky, who is often his partner in horticultural intrigue. The couple celebrate their 49th wedding anniversary in September.

“Don is one of those rare individuals you come across once or twice a lifetime. He is the epitome of who you want on your team,” said Walter Marquez, President and CEO of Fairplex. “His passion for horticulture is evident, his love of the LA County Fair is infectious, and his commitment to education is beyond question – from the formal classroom to school fieldtrips at The Farm at Fairplex. He is like a walking encyclopedia! Fairplex has been fortunate to call Don a member of the team and a friend.”

DeLano started with Fairplex in 1991, after several years as a lecturer in Ornamental Horticulture, a Greenhouse Structure advisor and Nursery Technician with Cal Poly Pomona, his alma mater. He had contracted with the LA County Fair prior to his hiring, serving as a manager for various public flower and garden displays in the Atrium and on the Hillside.

Once employed full time, DeLano oversaw year-round landscaping, and landscaping and garden design for the Fair. He studied the plant life on the campus and came to know every tree, every rose bush and shrub that dotted the 487 acres. When Fairplex planned a small produce garden through a grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, DeLano was instrumental in getting that off the ground. This also saw the start of Fairplex and Sheraton Fairplex Hotel's Farm-to-Table dinners, where Sheraton chefs cooked and served dinner using produce from the garden, right in the garden.

Then, in 2012, Fairplex embarked on a grander urban garden plan – which today is the five-acre The Farm at Fairplex. DeLano has managed The Farm since its beginning, planting native California crops as

well as other fruits and vegetables that are today harvested and used by the restaurant and catering team at the Sheraton Fairplex Hotel & Conference Center.

The Farm is also the site of educational programs for youth and adults. Agriculture classes from The Learning Centers at Fairplex's Career and Technical Education Center are taught in The Farm. Local schools attend field trips, where DeLano and his team teach students about healthy eating and how to grow their own produce, even if they live in an apartment. Don has been instrumental in these education programs, teaching volunteers from the Fairplex Ambassador program to be field trip docents. He also works with a team of Ambassadors year-round to maintain The Farm at Fairplex, passing on his passion to volunteers.

A history buff, and distant relative to Franklin DeLano Roosevelt, DeLano took it upon himself to write the history of Fairplex. He remembers when the monorail came down, has seen various iterations of the campus and was instrumental in assisting with Fairplex's most recent Strategic Plan.

Of course, his depth of knowledge doesn't extend to just flora. He is well-versed on fauna, too. DeLano spearheaded the return of livestock competitions to the LA County Fair in 2022 after nearly 15 years, working with regional Future Farmers of America, 4H and livestock associations to see the return of showing animals for awards and ribbons. He also worked closely with Cal Poly Pomona to populate the Fair's Big Red Barn with animals, enhancing the most popular attraction at the Fair. A true animal advocate, he has fostered many cats and kittens found on the Fairplex campus, adopting them out to good homes.

DeLano is a member of the Board of Directors for the 48th District Agriculture Association and for Claremont's Oak Park Cemetery, an editor and content creator for the Los Angeles International Fern Society's Journal, and a grant reader for the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

Fairplex is fortunate to have had a committed, passionate person like Don DeLano as part of its team for 30 years. He will be missed but he has left a lasting legacy.

For more information about Fairplex, visit www.fairplex.com.

Media contact:

Renee Hernandez

O: 909-865-4261

M: 909-525-8404

hernandez@fairplex.com