

2025 ANNUAL MEDICINAL PLANT CONSERVATION AWARD

— Recipient —

MICHAEL MCGUFFIN

HONORING MICHAEL

By Susan Leopold

Michael McGuffin passed away this past February, having been United Plant Savers' longest-standing board member. In many ways, he was Plant Savers' historian for the past 30 years. It was an honor to be able to speak at the AHPA member meeting at Expo West and share his impact on me personally, the plants, and his dedication to United Plant Savers. Michael

schooled me on the basics of budgets and finances as the treasurer when I took on the job as Executive Director. It takes many skills to be a director of a small non-profit, and much of the work is not the fun stuff of hands in the earth but spreadsheets and data management. Michael also traveled with me to Switzerland for my first CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) meeting, showing me the ropes of how the meeting works and the protocols involved. It takes a village to protect plants, and understanding the various stakeholders is key — from those that set and monitor the legal framework, the natural products industry, the growers, harvesters, and dealers. This is what United Plant Savers and the American Herbal Products Association share at the core of both missions: responsible and

sustainable commerce of medicinal plants. I am super appreciative of Michael's dedication to both organizations, and what he leaves behind in his legacy is that both organizations are stronger in their missions because of him. We are excited to dedicate a trail at the sanctuary to Michael, in honor of one of his favorite plants, sassafras. In Michael's final months, he took the time to write and

publish a super fun story about his early days when he was part of the Venice Fruit Tramps. It takes place in 1974, when society was experimenting with how commerce and community can create meaningful collaboration. It's a good read and captures Michael's wit and optimism as we follow our dreams and passions.



Michael McGuffin (1951-2025)

And lastly, I wanted to share a note from Rosemary to the board after Michael's passing:

Dear Ones at United Plant Savers,

I know we're all heartbroken over the death of Michael. In fact, I've been a faucet all week; just can't stop crying. He was such an advocate and friend to all of us, and the plants, and held a special place with United Plant Savers. While Michael was incredibly well known and respected for his work in the herbal products industry, he was equally involved and committed to plant conservation and preservation. He was our longest-serving board member, having served for over 30 years on our board. That's quite remarkable. And as I recall, at least when I was on the board, he hardly ever missed a meeting. I have some great photos of Michael at our early meetings.

Quite truthfully, I think Michael may have accepted our invitation to join the UpS board to keep an eye on us. We were a rather rowdy group of herbalists concerned with issues of overharvesting and the demise of our native populations, and felt the industry needed to play a much larger role in stewardship and conservation. And he was,



United Plant Savers board meeting

after all, the soon-to-be president of AHPA. But Michael was a plant lover at heart, and I think he remained a loyal board member for so many years because he enjoyed the company of other herbalists and loved that our meetings were almost always in places of natural beauty surrounded by plants. He spent so much time working in an office that I'm sure getting out among the plants fed his heart.

Once, while I was still on the board, Michael invited us for a meeting at his home in Venice, where we got to visit the beautifully flourishing community garden he had started so many years ago. I remember on that visit seeing a photo of him taped to his refrigerator, where he looked very unlike the Michael I knew. The photo showcased a young, long-haired hippy playing in a rock band! It gave me a whole new appreciation for who Michael was.

I loved working with him during our tenure together on the UpS board. We often stood on opposite sides of discussions, but I always learned so much from Michael. He always listened respectfully, was open to new ideas and thoughts, and was nonjudgmental. And he was so brilliant. While he was often the quietest in the room and never spoke just to hear himself talk, when he did speak, we all listened. There was always something to glean from Michael's comments and conversations.

I think of Michael as the quiet advocate for herbalists and the herbal community. Often working behind the scenes, he took on major issues without most herbalists even knowing who he was or how his work impacted their herbal work. I wonder sometimes if he wished he had remained a musician playing in his rock band, or one of the volunteer gardeners in the beautiful, flourishing community garden he started in his Venice neighborhood years ago. But he went to Washington, D.C., instead, to serve, and worked in his office hour upon hour, year after year, completely devoted to the plants and an herbal community who, except for the herbal business community, hardly knew the importance of the work that he did.

He leaves an amazing legacy both in the herbal industry and in plant conservation and stewardship, and will be missed greatly — not only for his contributions but his incredible wisdom, thoughtfulness, and kindness. As you may know, I have been doing a podcast series called *Voices of Our Herbal Elders*. Michael and I were trying to find a time for his interview earlier this year, but sadly, it never happened. Thankfully, his legacy is so huge that he will be remembered a very long time for his many contributions.

~ Rosemary