

June 12, 2015

Dear Sages over Seventy Selection Committee,

I am pleased to share my admiration and appreciation for Elvin McDonald as a renowned authority to the horticulture world, as the author of at least 50 gardening books—and the photographer for many of them. He is a continuing inspiration through his tireless work on behalf of public and private gardens, community boards of Greater Des Moines, the arts and his church.

Elvin's long and distinguished professional writing career began after his graduation from Balko High School in Balko, Oklahoma. In 1956, he co-founded *Flower & Garden* magazine in Kansas City. In 1958, he became the editor of outdoor books at The Macmillan Company in New York. After two years, he returned to Kansas City with *Flower & Garden* until 1967 when he became garden and music editor for *House Beautiful*.

It's worth noting that Elvin's rise to prominence in the gardening world came by the sheer force of hard work and enthusiasm, not any formal degrees in horticulture or writing. Most of his education came studying opera voice at the University of Missouri in Kansas City and Mannes College of Music in New York City.

A defining moment in Elvin's life arrived in 1975 when he began three decades of a gardening partnership with the late New York newspaper columnist and socialite, C.Z. Guest. Elvin's New York City connections strengthened when he worked in numerous capacities at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden from 1985-1992. He created exhibits for the New York Flower Show; collaborated with the Department of Cultural Affairs for \$10 million in city funds for a new conservatory; and served as committee chair for the agricultural curricula for the New York City Board of Education. His twice-weekly King Features syndicated gardening column was snapped up by as many as 750 newspapers between 1975 and 1990.

Always seeking new challenges, Elvin moved to Houston, Texas in 1992 where he served as garden editor at the *Houston Post*, created a weekly television program, and managed The Compleat Gardener, an upscale garden center, as well as designing, installing and maintaining public and private gardens.

Publishing powerhouse Meredith Corporation, lured Elvin in 1995 to its headquarters in Des Moines as garden editor for *Traditional Home*. Elvin quickly charmed residents of Des Moines with his unique amalgamation of down-to-earth Midwestern roots coupled with the zeal and spirit of his New York and Houston experiences. His dapper dress (complete, more often than not, with bow tie), and his chatty recitation quickly made him a community favorite. In 2003, Elvin switched magazines at Meredith to become deputy garden editor (and later editor-at-large) for *Better Homes and Gardens*, retiring in 2009.

Since his arrival in Des Moines, Elvin has generously given his time to the boards of Salisbury House and Gardens; the Des Moines Metro Opera; the historic gardens committee at Terrace Hill; St. Paul's Cathedral; the Des Moines Public Library Foundation; and other community organizations. He served on the board of the Friends of the Des Moines Botanical Center until 2007, when he resigned to become its full-time director until 2012. On the occasion of Elvin's retirement, The Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden named a new daffodil cultivar "Elvin's Voice" in honor of his contributions to the institution's transformation and his storied career in garden communications. Elvin's voice has been heard around our community, our region and nation.

With a strong lifetime love of learning, Elvin is always reading, from biographies to novels. He funded the Elvin McDonald Horticultural Library at Deep Cut Park, Monmouth County, New Jersey, and was instrumental in establishing a horticulture library at the Des Moines Botanical Center.

Elvin has been the recipient of numerous national honors including induction into the Garden Writers Association Hall of Fame after nomination by his peers in 1998. Local honors followed when in 2008 he was declared an Iowa State University Honorary Master Gardener by the Polk County Master Gardeners. The Des Moines Founders Garden Club nominated Elvin for honorary membership to the Garden Club of America in 2012 and he received that distinction. In 2011 he was named a Des Moines Public Library Iowa Author of the Year. Currently Elvin serves as President of the Des Moines Public Library Foundation.

Elvin has two children: Mark Elvin McDonald of Kansas City, and Steven McDonald of Glencoe, Illinois; and five grandchildren. He lives with his partner, John Zickefoose, in a modest West Des Moines home with a grand garden that he graciously opens for special events, which have benefited numerous local charities.

Elvin has been most generous with his time and leadership talents throughout the Des Moines community. It is my honor to recommend Elvin McDonald as a friend and mentor to be recognized for dsm Sages Over Seventy.

Yours very truly,

Brenda Mouw