

In Memoriam: Pete Vines

By Rick Bauer and Carolyn Beck—Northern Virginia Chapter

It is with great sadness that we report that Northern Virginia chapter member and noted azalea hybridizer, Pete Vines, of Amelia Island, FL, passed away on September 5, 2025. Pete retired from the U.S. Army in 1982 as a colonel after 30 years of service. He joined the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA in 1980.

Ronald Cassell “Pete” Vines Sr. grew up in Beckley, West Virginia. He graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1952 and entered the U.S. Army. He married his wife Wilma (Peggy) Vines in 1954. His tenure in the army took him to a variety of locations in the United States and in Asia, including one tour in Korea and two in Vietnam, as well as 23 relocations. Pete was both a helicopter and fixed wing pilot, and his favorite flying was during an assignment to Alaska where he was able to traverse the Arctic with its beauty and wildlife and land on Denali. He also attended the Naval War College in Newport, RI.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star with two Oak Leaf clusters, the Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf clusters, and a Legion of Merit for Valor and Combat.

Pete developed his love of plants from his father and grandfather. His father, Woodrow Wilson (Buck) Vines, was an avid gardener and loved unusual forms of azaleas, such as those with strap petals. Pete named one of his strap petal hybrids ‘W. W. Vines’ in his honor. In 1970, after Pete returned from his second Vietnam tour, Buck asked him to help raise 500 small azaleas in his Virginia yard. Within a year, Pete was hooked. Pete’s brother had an extra lot in Richmond, where Pete moved the plants and heeled them in. He started propagating these varieties.

Pete started a nursery in 1979, Vines Horticultural Garden, in Springfield, VA, and started hybridizing azaleas. He named his hybrids “Holly Springs” azaleas, after the town of Holly Springs, Mississippi, near his alma mater, the University of Mississippi. His goal in developing these hybrids was to produce plants with larger blooms (greater than 3 inches), dwarf to mid-sized growth habit (3 feet or smaller in 10 years), extended bloom season, variability of bloom color and increased cold hardiness (down to -20°F). Cultivars were selected for naming after lengthy testing and rating. Over 41,000 seedlings were produced from 451 crosses.

As part of his preparation for his hybridizing program, Pete collected hundreds of cultivars from other hybrid groups. From these, he chose what he considered the best potential parents. Among them were selections from Back Acres, Eden, Harris, Girard, Glenn Dale, Robin Hill, Linearifolium, Linwood, Mossholder, Roehr, Rutherford, Satsuki, Shammarello, Sonoma Dwarf, and Southern Indian. As he began to identify superior clones from his program, these were added to the parent pool.



Pete with Vines family members at the 2022 Holly Springs Legacy Garden dedication at the Jenkins Arboretum. Photo by Rick Bauer.

His most successful cross was ‘Nancy of Robinhill’ × ‘Shinnyo-no-tsuki’. Eleven cultivars from this pairing were named: ‘Holly Springs Double Delight’, ‘Jeffery Alan’, ‘Nightingale’, ‘Orange Fluff’, ‘Peggy Vines’, ‘Holly Springs Pink Parfait’, ‘Poignant’, ‘Rose Gutierrez-Kolb’, ‘Saint Moritz’, ‘Virginia Vines’, and ‘Holly Springs Whipped Cream’. Pete declared this cross his best. By far, ‘Peggy Vines’ was his favorite. He was very proud of this cultivar.

Pete’s nursery, Vines Horticulture Gardens, was on a mere third of an acre that surrounded his home, and offered “rare and unusual azaleas for the discriminating collector.” In spite of space constraints, in 1990, approximately 1,700 varieties, including 84 of his hybrids, were available for sale. To assist his customers, he produced a yearly catalog listing cultivars, along with detailed descriptions.

In 1991, Pete moved to Amelia Island, FL, where he continued to make crosses on a limited basis. Currently there are 102 named and registered Holly Springs varieties in the Azalea Society of America’s (ASA) database.

The Holly Springs azaleas are a Legacy variety in the ASA’s Legacy Project. One of the output products of the project is the creation of Legacy Gardens. Jenkins Arboretum in Devon, PA, was interested in developing a Holly Springs Legacy Garden and in working closely with the Northern Virginia Chapter, developed the garden, which was dedicated in May 2022. Pete, his friend Jean Mauldin, and members of the Vines family were able to attend the dedication and meet Jake Summers, the Jenkins Hamilton Educational Fellow, who designed and coordinated the development of the garden. Jenkins Arboretum sponsored and was also on the itinerary of the 2025 ASA convention. We were pleased to see Pete again and have the opportunity to see the growth of the garden after three years.

Pete will be greatly missed by those who had the pleasure of knowing him. Our condolences go out to the Vines family and to his longtime friend Jean.