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Decades long collaboration continues at Archbold

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From left: Dr. Pedro Quintana-Ascencio, Dr. Warren “Abe” Abrahamson, and Dr. Eric Menges at Archbold Biological Station.

COURTESY/CHRIS ABRAHAMSON

LAKE PLACID — This January, Archbold welcomed back three friends and colleagues to the Station: Dr. Eric Menges, Archbold emeritus research biologist and former Plant Ecology Program director; Dr. Warren ‘Abe’ Abrahamson, Archbold research associate and emeritus professor at Bucknell University, and Dr. Pedro Quintana-Ascencio, Archbold research associate and professor at University of Central Florida. They returned to continue their decades long —

collaborations in the Plant Ecology Program.

As plant ecologists, these scientists enjoy discovering pieces of the giant puzzle that is the complex web of life on our planet. Each discovery is like finding another piece and fitting it into the right place. These friends and colleagues have been working on the puzzle of life at Archbold for decades and have fit many pieces together.

Abrahamson first visited Archbold Biological Station in 1972 as a graduate student at Harvard University and has been returning nearly every year since. Shortly after he started as faculty at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, Abrahamson became a research associate at the Station. With a background in ecology and evolution, he was interested in studying the ecology and demography of plants in the Florida scrub and the role of fire in this unique ecosystem. One of his many interesting long-term projects at Archbold focuses on the growth of saw palmettos (*Serenoa repens*). Over the course of many years, with the help from field assistants, including his wife Chris Abrahamson, he showed that saw palmettos only grow an average of a half-inch per year, can take 200 years to mature, and that individual clones may be thousands of years old!

Menges arrived at Archbold in June 1988 to start as the Plant Ecology Program director. This position allowed him to study an ecosystem with many rare plants, and how the ecosystem and plants responded to disturbance from fire and climate. He served as an outstanding scientist and leader of scientific research, conservation and education activities at Archbold until his retirement in 2021. Under his leadership, the Plant Ecology Program trained 33 research assistants and 127 Archbold research interns, nearly all of whom have gone on to great careers across the nation and internationally.

Quintana-Ascencio started at Archbold as a visiting researcher in 1994 while working on his PhD thesis (he served on his dissertation committee), later becoming a post-doctoral fellow at Archbold from 2000-2003. After he started as faculty at the University of Central Florida, Quintana-Ascencio continued his collaboration with Archbold, and has visited every year since. His interests include understanding the ecological role of disturbance in ecosystems, and the Florida scrub at Archbold is a perfect place to conduct his research. A recent collaboration utilizes Archbold's long-term plant demography data sets to understand and predict plant responses to fire and the climate.

With a combined 112 years of research in the Florida scrub (Abrahamson: 50; Menges: 34; and Quintana-Ascencio: 28), 'long-term' is an apt adjective to describe their science and relationship,

long-term data, long-term collaborations, and a long-term friendship. We hope they continue to collaborate, continue to collect long-term data, and continue to be friends to each other and to Archbold, with many more visits to come.