

# AFISH Convention 2007



*A dream comes true ~ now forever a treasured memory.....*

by **CLAUDIA DICKINSON**  
With photographs by the author

Our GCAS President, Joe Ferdenzi, had a dream. After two years of preparations, the culmination of that dream, the first AFISH Convention, has come and passed, going down in history as an extraordinary success, and leaving behind fond memories, along with the anticipation of many more to follow in the ensuing years. Brimming with an unmatched warmth and camaraderie of fellow hobbyists who convened from the four counties that make up Long Island, NY — Kings, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk — as well as New Jersey, Connecticut, and beyond, the first AFISH Convention was held in Riverhead, NY, on November 9th ~ 11th 2007. It took place at the Best Western Hotel, just minutes away from the Atlantis Marine World Aquarium.

Joe, along with Al DiSpigna and Joseph Graffagnino, past and current Presidents of the Brooklyn Aquarium Society, Harry Faustmann and Michael Foran, past and current Presidents of the Nassau County Aquarium Society, and Vinny Kreyling and Arie Gilbert, past and current Presidents of the Long Island Aquarium Society, joined together to form AFISH, the Aquarium Federation of Independent Societies and Hobbyists. Meticulous planning went into this exciting project, providing an opportunity for hobbyists in the Long Island and metropolitan New York area to experience a convention and all that it has to offer, including celebrated speakers, vendors, side trips, and of course, the sharing of deep friendships.

AFISH had it all! Finally, a convention that was less than a four hour trip for most attendees, the majority had a short drive of less than two hours, and many lived within 15 or 20 minutes of the site. Of course, a huge thank you to those who did make the effort to travel a further distance! The event was suffused with the generous support and goodwill of all who came.

No sooner had I pulled my car up to the curb on Friday night than I was greeted by the welcoming voice of Ray "Kingfish" Lucas, immediately followed by cheerful smiles and warm hugs from Harry Faustmann, Mike McNamee, Joseph Graffagnino, Ken Davis, and Frank Laudato, with as many helping hands so kindly

pitching in to assist me with unloading boxes of treats and decorations.

Making my way down the hall to my room, my steps quickened at the wonderfully familiar jovial laughter resounding from behind one of the doors. It was all I could do to hastily drop my luggage off, and back I went to join in with heartfelt hugs, and much conviviality amongst dear friends, Joe Ferdenzi, Chuck Davis, Jeannie and Rosario LaCorte, Al Di Spigna, Mark Soberman, and Michael Foran. Joseph Graffagnino, Ken Davis, and Mike McNamee had found their way here as well, making it a Grande way to start the celebration! Earlier in the evening, the Long Island Killifish Association had gotten the convention underway with a presentation by Mark Denaro of [www.anubiasdesign.com](http://www.anubiasdesign.com) fame, and it was now time to sit back, relax, and enjoy each other's company. Sensibility finally reined me away to get some rest for the coming day's large agenda.

Saturday commenced with renowned catfish experts, Lee Finley and Mark Soberman, teaming up for an audience of eager listeners, while curator and cofounder of Atlantis Marine World, Joe Yaiullo, spoke on *Reef Aquariums*. Next up, Senior Aquarist for the New York Aquarium, Frank Greco, presented *Freshwater Shrimp*, while Chris Paparo, Senior Aquarist at Atlantis Marine World, shared his knowledge on *Macro Algae Cultivation*. A dear gem of the organized hobby, Chuck Davis, spoke to a packed audience on *Anabantoids*, while Mark Denaro's renowned expertise with aquatic plants was met by an enthusiastic audience. Following a break for lunch, our treasured aquarium hobby legend, Rosario LaCorte, treated us to his years of wisdom on *Rare and Exotic Fish*, while Atlantis Marine World Aquarist, Todd Gardner, presented his wealth of knowledge on *Seahorses*. For a perfect rounding out of the afternoon, noted aquarist (maintaining 600 tanks!) Ken Davis gave an excellent presentation on *Discus*, while the famed Tullio Dell Aquila brought his many years of experience on *New Lighting Technology*.

Throughout the day, the vendor room and foyers were animated with the bustle and

exuberance of dear friends, ardent fish talk, and hearty laughter. Lance Reyniers, inventor of the Python water changer, every aquarist's most essential tool, was on hand to personally answer questions and offer advice, alongside the illustrious and beloved Ray "Kingfish" Lucas. Special friend to the entire aquarium hobby, Lee Finley, of Finley Aquatic Books, [www.finleyaquaticbooks.com](http://www.finleyaquaticbooks.com), brought his exemplary collection of new and collectable books, and Ken Menard of Ken's Fish, [www.kensfish.com](http://www.kensfish.com), had a virtual store of fabulous merchandise. Craig Shaubach of Eastern Aquatics made certain that we all went home with a generous helping of fresh, luscious blackworms, while the *Tropical Fish Hobbyist* booth, resplendent with the artistry and brilliance of one lovely cover after another, passed out free issues of the celebrated magazine. Booth after booth filled our arms with such wonders as only we can understand, as the cheerful and informative vendors went out of their way to lend their ideas to be taken home along with their wares.

So many faces, so many GCASers, and so many from our fellow societies! Surely it was family with every turn of the head - Joe Ferdenzi, Mark Soberman, Pete D'Orio, Warren Feuer, Brad Dickinson, Sharon Barnett, Dan and Marsha Radebaugh, Michael Foran, Jeff Bollbach, Artie Friedman, Harry Faustmann, Mike McNamee, Lenny Ramroop, Jack Traub, Al Grusell, Ed Vukich, Bennie Graham, Rich Levy, Horst Gerber, Michael and Natalie Boscia, Fred Bellise, Ben and Emma Haus, Steven and Donna Sica, Andrew Jacovina, Bill Amely, Joseph Graffagnino, Al DiSpigna, Jim and Margaret Peterson, LaMonte Brown, Mario Bengcion, Karen Ottendorfer, Gino Cusano, Jerry O'Farrell, Izzy Zwerin, Chuck Davis, Rosario and Jeannie LaCorte, Christine and Frank Policastro, all the way from New Jersey (!), Vinny and Jeanette Kreyling, and oh, so many more.....

As the evening banquet approached, we changed into our "finery," tables filled, and glasses toasted amongst the lively conversation that filled the air. Following a sumptuous buffet, coffee was poured and a divine cake, garnished with the AFISH logo, was brought out along with a lovely bouquet of flowers in celebration of Jeannie and Rosario's 56th anniversary. How wonderful that we were able to share this joyful occasion with them!

Joe Ferdenzi took the podium in his characteristically genuine welcoming style, making us all feel at home, and glad that we came to AFISH. The eminent cast of speakers, the exceptional vendors, and the large team of dedicated people who worked to make this first AFISH Convention possible were given words of deep appreciation. To thunderous applause, three

very special awards were presented to those who had inspired Joe, and so many of us in the hobby, over the past years — Rosario LaCorte, Chuck Davis, and Ray Lucas. It was then time for a rare treasure to the aquarium world, a man passionate for his subject, and vibrant with infectious enthusiasm, Anton Lamboj, to give the AFISH keynote presentation on *The Genus Chromidotilapia*. After Anton's fascinating and informative talk, we regrouped for further discussion and laughter — reminiscing and relaxing, enjoying each other's company well into the night.

Sunday began with delicious pastries and jam, fresh eggs, crisp bacon and sausages, accompanied by steaming hot coffee and tea, partaken in amongst the comfortable companionship of true friends. With the huge auction to begin at noon, expanses of tables, overflowing with bags of fish and plants, attracted throngs of viewers who wound their way in and around the assemblage amidst excited exclamations over the bounty of finds. Ray "Kingfish" Lucas had us off to an exhilarating start, auctioning off an enormously generous amount of dry goods donated by Python Products, Aquarium Pharmaceuticals, Ken's Fish, *Tropical Fish Hobbyist*, and Atlantis Marine World, among many other magnanimous contributors. After this rousing opening, the audience was warmed up and prepared for raising their bidding cards high on the hundreds of bags of fish and plants that followed, to the finesse of such auctioneer greats as Chuck Davis, Joe Ferdenzi, Mark Soberman, and Ken Davis.

It was time to say final farewells. Huge hugs, warm smiles, and words of friendship that would hold our spirits fast, and solidify our kinship until we meet again. The first AFISH Convention is now a wonderful memory to last through eternity.

Joe had a dream. A dream that we might all be given the opportunity of sharing the joy of our hobby with one another. What great pride we have in what Joe has accomplished, and for having a dream and following it. For this, he will always be able to look back and say, "I am so glad that I did!" And, to our great fortune, we will always be able to look back and say, "we are so glad that he did," as well!



**Joe Ferdenzi honors three pillars of the aquarium hobby with special AFISH awards.**



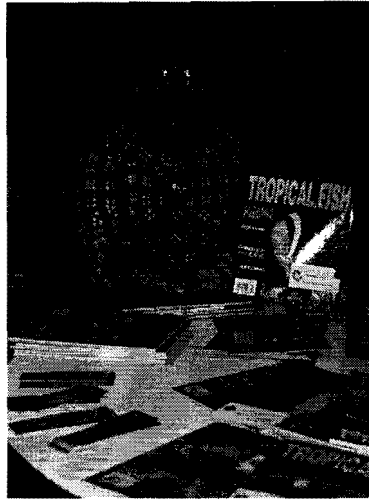
**Chuck Davis**



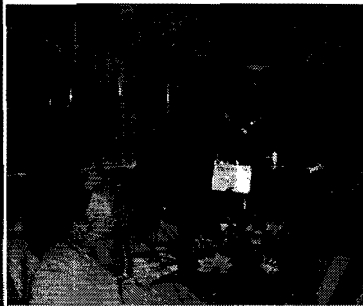
**Ray "Kingfish" Lucas**



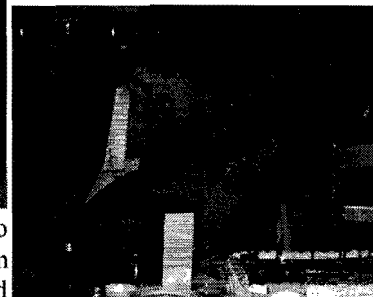
**Rosario LaCorte**



*Tropical Fish Hobbyist's* booth of spectacular brilliance generously offers free copies of the magazine.

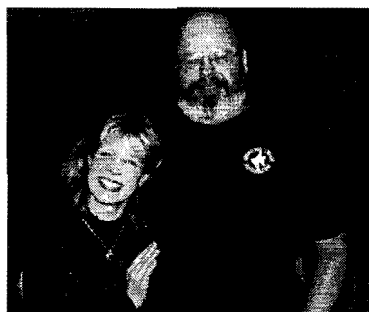


Joe Ferdenzi presents a bouquet to the lovely Jeannie LaCorte in celebration of Rosario and Jeannie's anniversary.



True treasures of the aquarium hobby, Rosario and Jeannie LaCorte make a special wish prior to blowing out the candles on their AFISH anniversary cake!

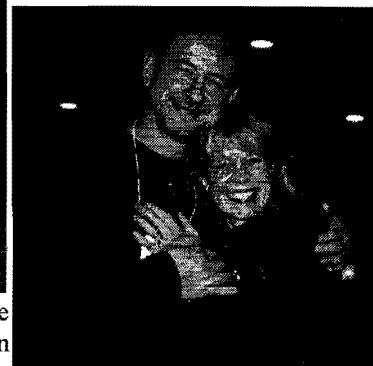
**The author steps on the other side of the lens to share time with special friends.**



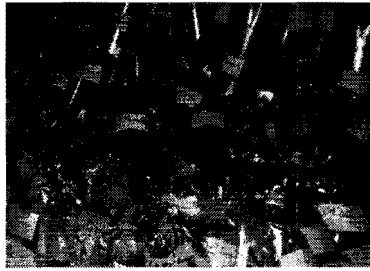
Claudia Dickinson and our superb AFISH discuss speaker, Ken Davis.



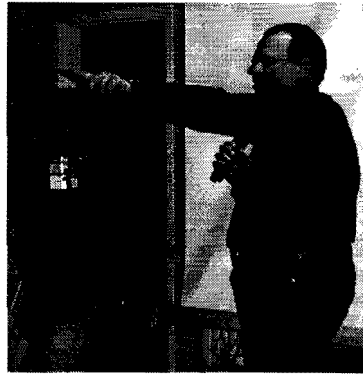
Claudia Dickinson and Lance Reyniers, inventor of *the* Python water changer, every aquarist's most indispensable tool!



Claudia Dickinson and our inimitable AFISH keynote speaker, Anton Lamboj.



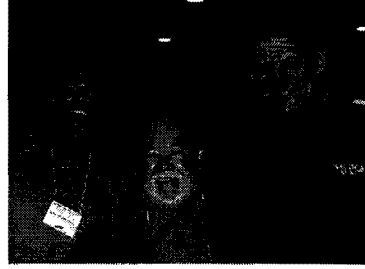
The bags of fish for auction were piled high!



Mark Soberman in full AFISH auctioneering swing (Artie Friedmann assisting on the left).



Karen Ottendorfer and Horst Gerber are having a Grande AFISH time!



Dan McKercher, Chuck Davis, and Ed Vukich celebrate the first AFISH Convention!

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## Last Month's Bowl Show Winners



**Bill Amely**  
1st Place



**Mario Bengcion**  
2nd Place



**Ed Vukich**  
3rd Place