



James R. Hill, III

William Dietrich: 2001 **PMCA** Landlord of the Year

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The *PMCA* is very pleased to name Bill Dietrich, of Naples, Florida, as its 2001 Landlord of the Year. Bill's efforts and accomplishments with Purple Martins span many years. A retired lawyer who was originally from Detroit, Michigan, Bill relocated to the Naples area with his wife Pat in 1986. Bill put up a martin house, immediately attracted martins, and soon became involved with the *Conservancy Purple Martin Society (CPMS)*, which was located in Naples. This group later renamed itself the *Purple Martin Society of Collier County (PMSCC)*. He was launched into an involvement with martins that lasts to this day and has grown to include a relationship with martin housing manufacturers, a continuing role in the *PMSCC*, and working as a consultant on the Stokes Purple Martin Book and the Stokes PBS show, "Birdwatch." As editor of the Society's newsletter since 1991, Bill Dietrich has helped direct the group's activities which include conducting annual community events that promote better awareness of

martins along with field research, both at members' colonies and also at the Collier County Extension Service colony site.

Bill has contributed articles to the *Update* in 1994 and 1997; "How to Start a Purple Martin Club" in *Update* Vol. 5(3) and "Home Improvements" in *Update* Vol. 7(3), in addition to numerous letters, scout reports, and Martinwatch data sheets. He is a natural-born researcher and has documented a variety of events at his own colony and the Extension Service site. Through many years of correspondence, emails, and phone calls, Bill Dietrich has become well-known to all of us at the *PMCA*, where he is warmly-liked and his opinions and observations are well-respected.

Bill lost Pat, his wife of more than 28 years, earlier this year. Besides her interest in cooking, sewing, and growing orchids, Pat shared in Bill's devotion to Purple Martins. Also a longtime member of the *PMSCC*, Pat served as the group's secretary.



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Left: Bill Dietrich, PMCA Landlord of the Year for 2001, demonstrating one of his test houses at the Collier County Extension Service outside of Naples, Florida. Here he pulls the Snyder Excluder-type fronts off of his test PVC pipe martin house. These bat-shaped entrances exclude starlings from nesting in martin housing. Above: Bill shows how he reverses the nest trays in a lowered aluminum Lonestar martin house during the off season to act as door stops. In the background are SuperGourds with owl/crow guards, a wooden T-14, Troyer horizontal gourds, and many other types of housing.

PMCA founder, James R. Hill, III stated that: *“At the Extension Service research site, you can see that he has a relationship with every martin organization and is testing the housing of nearly every manufacturer of martin products. He is dedicated and committed to helping Purple Martins and is capable of cutting through a manufacturer’s hype to find what really works to attract and manage Purple Martins. Bill is an assertive man who speaks his mind. He is not afraid to tell a manufacturer the shortcomings of their housing, and to help them improve their product. With the PMCA, Bill has played a valuable role in the final development of the Purple Martin Prognosticator. In 1996, when Ed Donath and I were developing it, Bill supplied the earliest-reported clutch initiation dates for the entire continent (the first week of March), causing us to expand the Prognosticator from its original planned 160 date cells to 180. Now, in our 2002 revision of the Prognosticator, we’ve expanded it to 200 date cells after Bill had a February 21st, clutch-initiation date in 2000.”*

Bill is actively involved with one of the few true martin research sites in the country. The PMSCC maintains this site at the County Extension Headquarters building. Tests are conducted that cover everything from housing types, cavity size, and entrance holes to owl guards, artificial nest material,

parasite control, and just about anything else imaginable. Innovative ideas are brought into play on the test houses, with the help of a few skilled assistants who fashion needed hardware, etc. Results of all these experiments are then published in the PMSCC’s monthly newsletter.

In Bill’s own words, here is his story: *“When did I first become interested in martins? I’m not sure. We never had martins when I was a kid. We had just about everything else. My folks both came over from Germany and my dad had wanted to be a landscaper but his dad made him go to tool & die school. While working as a tool & die maker at Chevrolet in Detroit, he bought a 10 acre parcel from a nursery in 1941. Two acres was nursery stock and eight acres was woods. He cleared the nursery stock and had a BIG vegetable garden. It was nothing to pick 100 quarts of strawberries in a week. I roamed the woods a lot and had pet crows, a couple of long eared owls, snakes, frogs, etc. But I don’t recall any effort to attract much more than wrens until my folks moved to Livonia, Michigan in the late 50’s after I was married. They put up a martin house on a huge tilt pole with a counterbalance weight on the bottom. They got a lot of sparrows and finally gave up.*

I spent about five years as a municipal attorney for Detroit when I moved to Midland, Michigan as City Attorney, where Pat

was my secretary. I moved back to Detroit to become General Counsel for the Department of Street Railways and then became Supervising Corporation Counsel for the City of Detroit. Pat was a legal secretary for the Labor Division of the State of Michigan and later for the Liquor Control Commission. To return to the topic of martins, when Pat and I retired to Florida in 1986, my 1/4-acre lot on a canal had no landscaping other than grass and I decided to put up a Purple Martin house that was advertised in the Sears Catalog (they still had one back then). It was an instant success. I then joined the Conservancy Purple Martin Society (CPMS) which had been formed a few years earlier. In February of 1991, I prepared a single-sheet newsletter to see if the members would like one and I have continued to edit eight issues a year to this day.

The CPMS had donated a number of Purple Martin houses to nursing homes, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, etc. In 1992, a member suggested we purchase AMT (Advanced Metal Technology) houses, two for \$79.95 plus \$13.00 shipping and two poles at \$29.95 each plus shipping. One was put at the Collier County Extension Service on April 1 and all 12 units were occupied. This started the demonstration housing site at the Extension Service. Unfortunately, the AMT house was made of steel and was badly rusted by the end of the first season. It was totally unusable after the second year.

In late 1992, I convinced then State Representative Mary Ellen Hawkins to sponsor a joint resolution in the Florida Legislature to designate Collier County as the Purple Martin Capitol of Florida. She enlisted the aid of our State Senator and it took them two years but in 1994 the Florida Legislature passed the joint resolution.

By 1996 I had a dozen houses up at the Extension Service demonstration housing site and worked with Don & Lillian Stokes

as they were preparing their Purple Martin Book. Many of the photos in the book were taken at the demo site and at the colonies of some of our members. Pat and I provided the photos for the nestling phase in the book and in 1997 Don Stokes and I did the on-camera work for the Purple Martin segment of the Don & Lillian Stokes BirdWatch series on PBS.

What do I enjoy most about the martins? Probably the challenges presented in trying to manage a successful Purple Martin colony. I enjoy charting their progress and learning more about what works to improve their reproductive success and what doesn't. Mites are a terrible problem in the south and we have now located a source of tobacco stems that will be shredded and used for bedding next year to determine if they are a natural deterrent to parasites. If the martins have no problem with it and it works as well as it does in pigeon nests in Cuba, this could be a giant leap forward. Then again, it may not work at all. That's the challenge.

My other interests are primarily gardening. I have been a Master Gardener since 1986 and advise homeowners on how to solve their landscape problems. Since Pat was such a terrific cook, I raised oranges, key lime, star fruit, macadamia nut, mango, avocado, litchi, jaboticaba, banana, and pineapple on our small lot (which is why I had no martins nesting in my yard this year, for the first time since we moved to Florida — too many trees).

About the only other hobby I am involved in is raising orchids. Again it was primarily because Pat was enthralled by them. We had a 50-50 arrangement. She bought them and I took care of them. The two of us would spend a solid week each year repotting our collection of

200 - 300 orchids, which means that it will be two to three weeks to do it alone. Probably the orchid collection will be reduced in size now and only the select varieties will be kept.



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Upper: Bill Dietrich kneeling in front of the Collier County Purple Martin Society's research site. Lower: Bill at one of the site's wooden T-14's. This one is porchless with crescent, starling-resistant entrance holes. Bill shows off his nest-check bucket/seat.



Charles Dietrich



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Upper: An active martin nest built at the Collier County research site in a Natureline plastic gourd that didn't have its snap-in door installed. Note the large mud dam the birds built and the nestlings behind. These young successfully fledged despite the gaping entrance. Lower: Bill Dietrich wearing his Purple Martin cap, complete with his collection of martin buttons and pins.

My son, Mark, lives in Dewitt, Michigan, outside of Lansing and is interested in birds and has been involved with Peregrine Falcons. He has a bachelor A-frame cabin on a small lake and is hosting all kinds of birds and is trying to attract martins. He has successfully weaned Tree Swallows from the martin gourd rack to a gourd on a shepherd's crook about 20' away and is amazed that they don't "dive-bomb" him or are concerned in the least that he

is around. The last time he checked the gourd, the female remained in the nest and glared at him. He is a computer tech with the State of Michigan Senate so he spends a lot of time on the Internet where he likes to stir up controversy.

Our 2002 season is about over. We just fledged the last clutch from the Troyer T-14 yesterday and have two martin nests and a starling nest left. I've had fun with starlings this year and can confirm that Duke Snyder's "Excluder" hole does exclude starlings when they are most motivated to get in. I put an Excluder on a compartment with starling eggs and the starling, unable to enter, moved to another compartment. A martin then started going into the compartment, so I removed the starling eggs and the martin has hatched three young, which should fledge on or after June 24, our last nest for 2002.

Bill Dietrich is the PMCA's 10th Landlord of the Year, and we are very pleased to honor him with this award. With his continuing role in the PMSCC's research and education projects, and editing their newsletter, he sets an example for landlords everywhere. Please join us in saluting his accomplishments.



The Purple Martin Society of Collier County

The Purple Martin Society of Collier County (PMSCC), originally known as the Conservancy Purple Martin Society (CPMS), was founded in 1984 through the efforts of Heinz Holzberg in connection with the Conservancy of Southwest FL. Martin houses were sold in the Conservancy's gift shop to raise funds for the Conservancy of SW FL, which supported formation of a local Purple Martin society. Meetings are held monthly (October through May) at a local restaurant. The Society has worked with local government officials to have the 3rd week of January designated as Purple Martin Week. They also donated martin houses to a number of public and private groups in the area. Currently the Society has about 110 members, many of whom go north for the summer months.

The Society's newsletter has been issued monthly since February of 1991. In March of 1992 the Society set up a martin house at the Collier County Extension Service adjacent to the County Fairgrounds on Immokalee Road. In the years that followed, the Society and individual members have added to the site with both commercial and experimental housing. It is now an acclaimed martin housing demonstration site and has appeared in the Stokes Purple Martin Book as well as having been featured in 1997 on the PBS program "Birdwatch."

The Society continues to be active in the community, promoting information, lectures, and slide shows on Purple Martins, and encouraging the provision of housing for these birds. Society activities include monthly meetings, a newsletter and library, information sharing, field trips, and community education projects. A more recent and popular event has been an annual Field Day with a banding demonstration by PMCA scientific advisor, Dr. Jerry Jack-son, of the Florida Gulf Coast University.

For more information about the Society, visit their website at: <www.naples.net/~pmssc>. To become a member and receive eight issues of their very enjoyable and informative newsletter, send a check for \$8.00, payable to the Purple Martin Society, to: Sue Glasson, Treasurer, 4850 Berkeley Dr., Naples, FL, 34112.