

Herbal emissary and pioneer Louis "Louie" Eugene Saso passed away at his home in Santa Cruz, California on August 7. He was 89.

Louie was born in Portland, Oregon, but his family moved to San Jose when he was 12, at a time when the Santa Clara Valley was full of fertile orchards. In 1940, he and his two brothers started a wholesale produce business, then in the late 40's, Louie formed his own business in Hayward, on the east side of San Francisco Bay. Through this business, he delivered fruits and vegetables to neighborhood grocery stores. But it was very competitive and stressful, so by the early 1960's, Louie and his wife Virginia decided to make career and lifestyle changes. Their family had grown to eight children, and they wanted to be around for them instead of working themselves into an early grave. In 1962 they bought a farmhouse on one acre in Saratoga, California, which later became their legendary garden. With this move, Louie began to cultivate his love of the earth and gardening.

Before herbs became widely popular, during the "back to the land" movement, Louie and Virginia established the Saso Herb Gardens in 1974. They planted thousands of varieties of culinary and medicinal herbs over the years, offered classes, tours, workshops and apprenticeships. Their nursery was a delight to behold, with unusual varieties of ornamental oreganos and other plants that made this young herbalist's mouth water and her heart beat faster during every visit.

As the years passed, Saso Herb Gardens became a green sanctuary in the middle of a high technology jungle, which was dominated by steel and glass buildings and million-dollar homes. You could go to the Gardens for a mind-stretching walk with Louie on a Saturday and forget that you were in Silicon Valley, as the spirit of the gardens, and of the Sasos, *resonated* permeated with more earthbound values. For the crafting crowd, Virginia's wreath-making and other workshops were second to none, and extremely well attended.

During my first visit to Saso Gardens in the 1970's, my adventure with herbs began and my life changed forever. Over the years, I attended many classes and walks at the Gardens, and volunteered around 1990. Many of the Sasos' plants became cherished residents at my home in San Jose. Louis and Virginia were my sole inspiration for creating the educational herb garden I have created in Hawai'i, which I call Hi'iaka's Healing Herb Garden. I even thought of calling it "Saso West" at one time, as I was so taken with the plants and the mission that they had created.

In recent years, Louie and Virginia retired to Santa Cruz, but he continued gardening until the end. A neighbor of theirs told me "although he became frail, he was always in the garden. He would talk about all the plants surrounding him and was patient with my girls (ages 7 and 9). He was constantly talking to many people at the same time, always about the garden."

Louis Saso is survived by Virginia, his wife of 63 years, six of their eight children, 17 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. He truly leaves a fertile legacy.