

John Michael Koros, who helped make the Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden in northern Harris County one of the region's largest collections of native and cultivated plants, died July 16, 2004. He was 50.

Koros, who had been in declining health for several years, was found dead in his cabin retreat near Magnolia. He apparently had a heart attack.

After study at Texas A&M University kindled his interest in wildlife ecology, Koros took a job as a groundskeeper at the arboretum in 1974. Five years later, he was named director.

"He had the gift of gab," said Koros' brother, William Koros, a professor of chemical engineering at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. "He read like a vacuum cleaner, a very intense character.

"He loved to get other people interested" in his own pursuits.

Koros is credited with transforming Mercer Arboretum from a mosquito-infested thicket of woods and flood plains into "a beautiful, living plant library," his favorite description of the place.

Koros' creed was: "Don't manage the environment; fit in with it," his brother said.

Linda Gay, current director of the arboretum, said, "John had plans and a vision for Mercer, and worked doing lectures and garden club talks to let the community know what they had in their own back yard. He was a horticulturist, plant conservationist and a visionary."

After 14 years with the arboretum, Koros became executive director of parks and planning for Harris County Precinct 4. The 250-acre Mercer Arboretum on Cypress Creek is a Precinct 4 facility. In the 1980s, expansion of the original 14-acre site began with a substantial contribution from Precinct 4 park funds.

In 1992, Koros was named environmental services manager for the Harris County Flood Control District.

Koros also helped plan the Greens Bayou Wetland Mitigation Bank Project, which preserves green belts and ecological resources.

He served on the board of the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center and was a board-certified professional wetlands scientist. A member of the American Orchid Society, Koros grew a variety of orchids in a greenhouse at his home.

A native of Houston, Koros was the son of William Alexander Koros, a natural gas company executive, and Mary Ellen Roth Koros. He graduated from Spring Branch High School and attended the University of Texas at Austin before transferring to Texas A&M.

Besides his brother, Koros leaves two sons, Jonathan Michael Koros and Christopher William Koros; and their mother, Lisa Ann Koros, all of Humble.