After car tires grumble good-naturedly over the gravel driveway, extravagant hibiscus blossoms wave at the windows, and uniform rows of potted vegetables flash their ranks, Dr. Kenneth L. Goldsberry’s home comes into view. “Work is my hobby,” he explains. Such a statement is understandable when one’s work is as stunning as Ken’s horticulture.

Born in Colorado Springs in 1932, Ken’s early years were filled with odd jobs like digging dandelions, discarding stale beer bottles, running paper routes, and sorting wood at a saw mill. “Did I do anything that was fun?” He ponders the question. “All my jobs were fun!”

After working at a greenhouse loading and dumping dirt, Ken thought to himself, “There’s got to be a better way to do this!” With that, he decided to study horticulture. He arrived at Colorado A&M in 1950, when tuition was $80 per quarter. After completing his undergraduate work in horticulture, he joined the United States Air Force, studying at navigator’s school in Houston and serving in the Military Air Transport Service in Hawaii. First Lieutenant Goldsberry eventually became the Air Force Academy’s Admissions Liaison Officer, where he worked for fourteen years.

After serving in the Air Force, Ken returned to visit CSU’s campus, only to be offered a job on the spot by one of his former professors. He accepted the position of foreman of the Lake Street greenhouses, which afforded him the rank of horticulturist, the ability to attend graduate school, and $100 per week. At his new job, he was told, “Boy, you’ve got big shoes to fill.” He responded genially, “Well, I’ve got big feet.” He proved himself by developing the Plant Environmental Research Center (PERC) using those greenhouses.

Finishing his Master’s in 1962, Ken made momentous discoveries concerning the carbon dioxide fertilization of the greenhouse atmosphere and its incredible benefits for plant growth. He and his co-worker Bob Holly traveled across the U.S., lecturing on their innovations in carbon dioxide injection.

When approached about pursuing a doctorate, despite his professional advancement, Ken responded, “I need a PHD like I need a hole in the head!” Eventually, however, he did earn his PHD from Iowa State University in 1969, specializing in the spectrotransmission of tinted fiberglass panels for greenhouse roofs. He even conducted a video project analyzing the flammability of greenhouses related to the use of fans and fiberglass. Perhaps one of his most notable successes is his development of the Colorado Majestic Mountain Series of dwarf pot carnations, which includes eight patented varieties of carnations.

Ken fondly remembers the campus during his freshman year, when the dairy barn stood where the Lory Student Center is now and when the rodeo arena was just west of the dairy farm. Looking ahead to the plans to replace PERC with a new football stadium, he warns against the folly of expenses and of building an open, north-facing structure in the Colorado climate. “The athletic director is not more important than horticulture. Not anyone. Not the president,” he declares.

After thirty-four successful years at CSU, Ken reminisces, “I was never one to set goals. I just took advantage of the opportunities that came.” He advises anyone who would come after him, “You’re not going to get anything done unless you do
extra on the side – after hours. Don’t expect someone to hand it to you – be aggressive.” Undoubtedly, Dr. Goldsberry’s hobby of hard work has paid off.