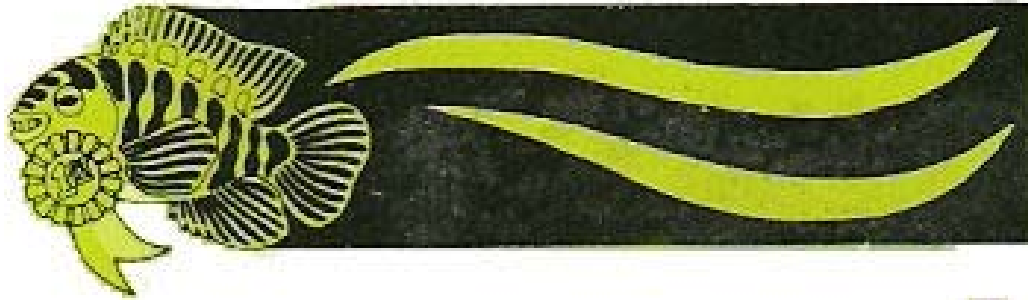


# Florida Exotic Fish Sales

*...a great American success story*



It began with Rick's passion for tropical fish, which grew from a single aquarium to a college apartment chocked-full of them. In 1971, in partnership with his brother Andy, Rick started Talli-M-Ports, as an entrepreneurial venture, while attending Florida State University.



A virtually unknown group of fishes; the brothers focused their attention on African cichlids. Locating a supplier stationed in Monkey Bay, on the southern shore of Lake Malawi, they began importing commercial quantities of the species that have become the mainstay of the hobby, including *Ps. auratus*, zebra, *fuelleborni*, *elongatus*, *L. trewavasae* and others.

# In 1973,



the brothers traveled to Lake Malawi in search of even more exotic fish, as well as new suppliers. They returned with several new varieties and export partners. One was instrumental in gaining access to Likoma Island, which became a fertile and abundant resource for a wide variety of new species. Another, located in the SW shore of Lake Malawi, Salima, began sending the Cobalt Blue zebra and another, collecting on the Mozambique shore sent the Red Zebra...all new fishes for the U.S. market.

# Unique and Promising



Recognizing that they were onto something unique and commercially promising, they returned to Africa again and found even more varieties.

Rick (22) and Peter Davies' Son (19)  
Monkey Bay, Lake Malawi, Africa  
1972

# 2 years later...



In just two years, Talli-M-Ports had made a name for itself, supplying retail customers coast-to-coast. From the humble garage operation to a frame building on Lake Bradford Rd in Tallahassee, FL the business continued to grow placing greater demands on a delicate supply of imports.



The following year, after Rick graduated with a B.S. degree in behavioral science, and having outgrown the Tallahassee operation, the business moved to a 5 acre farm in Homestead, Florida. By this time, they were importing fish from Lake Tanganyika as well some of the tributary Malawi rivers and introducing new fish like, *Tropheus duboisi*, and *Haplochromis moorei*.



Rick decided that breeding the fish – rather than relying on a constantly changing cast of suppliers half-a-world-away would be a more sustainable business model. He began carving dozens of large pools into the coral rock on his new farm, creating a tropical environment that proved ideal for breeding African cichlids. Over the next 25 years they replaced the in-ground ponds with modern breeding pools.

# Florida Exotic Fish Sales, Inc.



In 1976 Rick became the sole owner of the business, which he renamed Florida Exotic Fish Sales, Inc. No longer relying on imports from Africa, the breeding operation had become fully self-sustaining, enabling Rick to become a reliable supplier of high-quality African cichlids to his many loyal customers.

# The new team...



*Rick and Tamela Biro were photographed at a FTFFA Awards Banquet.*

Rick now operates FEFS with his wife, Tamela. Together, they have received multiple national awards and commendations, and introduced dozens of new breeds to the industry.

# Among their more notable achievements

- FEFS was the 1<sup>st</sup> to introduce the Albino Aulonocara to the hobby in 1986, winning “Best New Egg Layer” in the annual Florida Tropical Fish Farmers Association show.
- They later entered, and won “Best in Show” June 1989, for the Albino Red Zebra, Red Aulonocara and Albino Half Crimson, developed on the farm.
- Won several awards and trophies at local fairs and national/regional fish shows, including “Best of Show” for L. Marmalade Fuelleborni in 1988.
- Their fish regularly appear in the leading industry magazines, and several unique breeds (including Albino Aulonocara, Albino Red Zebra, Red Aulonocara and Marmalade Fuelleborni) have been featured on four magazine covers.

# Andrew - 1992

Like most businesses, Florida Exotic has weathered its share of challenges over the years. Perhaps the biggest came in August 1992, when Hurricane Andrew blew across south Florida. The eye of the deadly storm passed directly over the farm, causing extensive damage to both the livestock and the structure, and briefly imperiling Rick's life. Though the farm was without power for 47 excruciating days, Rick was able to acquire a diesel pump five days after the storm hit, allowing him, by God's grace and seemingly endless days of back-breaking work, to salvage the business. It took more than two years to fully recover from Andrew, but the experience prepared Rick for the hurricanes that would follow, including two in 2005.

# Xtreme Aquatic Food

From the very start of the fish-farm operation, bulk feeding was a challenge. Most commercially available feeds were produced for the trout and catfish farms that then dominated the industry. Need became the catalyst for innovation, leading Rick to create his first cichlid recipe using a variety of ingredients, with baby food serving as the binding agent. Over the next 35 years, he experimented with many protein sources, binders, natural color additives, vitamins and minerals, eventually producing a formula that promoted the health, color and productivity of his fish. Many of Florida Exotic's customers wanted to use the food in their operations, but the dough form (designed for high-volume farm feeding) did not allow it.



Not until 2000, when Rick and Tamela met Mike and Jennifer who had their own successful farm-food formula containing many of the same high-quality ingredients – did the pieces fall into place for a collaboration resulting in the introduction of Xtreme Aquatic Foods in 2006.

# **“It takes a steady hand to hold a full cup”**

Since it's meager beginnings, the trips to Africa, the move to Homestead, the change from importing to breeding, Hurricane Andrew, and now Xtreme Aquatic Foods, success and progress has traversed many “mountains and valleys.”

“It hasn't always been easy, recalls Rick. Fish farming is 24/7 all year long. It's draining tanks and ponds in the rain, in the hot and humid summers and in the cold winters when just “jumping in” is torture. It's packing 100 fish boxes at 1:00 in the morning and driving 30 miles to the airport. It's sitting up all night waiting to see if the weather holds, if the storm's coming, if the wind will ever stop. It's working for years on a new specie and hoping the hobbyist will love the results of the investment and effort.”

“After 35 years you'd think we'd have seen it all, but every day we learned more, we improve the operation and we adjust to the needs and demands of our customers and the industry as a whole. At almost 60, it's not what I thought I would be doing, but I wouldn't trade the ride for anything.”