



2020-2021 President's Report

Submitted by Nate Bremer-President

October 14, 2021

Good evening American Peony Society Members! I'd like to welcome everyone and thank you for participating in our 'replacement' General Annual Membership Meeting and Elections. I do hope everyone has been able to remain healthy and that your gardens have provided needed enjoyment in these unprecedented times.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic this meeting is normally held after the convention banquet. The General Annual Membership Meeting provides a chance for APS members to learn about the activities in which the Society has been involved in over the last year, as well as, provide financial updates, membership information and other key points.

As this meeting is being held via Zoom, it has some inherent challenges, namely sound and video quality/connections. While challenging, the format will allow APS to fulfill our obligation to its bylaws in reporting annual activities. That said, a couple of points that may be helpful on this call:

- 1) We'll follow the agenda provided the website as closely as possible to allow the meeting to be carried out efficiently and hopefully make it a short one, so we can get back to our busy autumn lives.
- 2) Please make sure to mute your sound and video if not speaking. This allows for a cleaner audio and saves bandwidth so connections are more stable.
- 3) If you would like to speak, please loudly use the hand icon/emoji at the bottom of your screen and we'll do our best to get you heard and seen. Once on, please greet everyone by supplying your name.
- 4) To provide clarity and detail, the website has links to Board of Director's Meetings and committee report summaries from the past year. These are available for review at any time through the member portal. Additionally, we will not read through the numerous reports, as this would take a great deal of time.

What is APS' member focus

As you read this report, you'll notice much of focus has been placed upon VOLUNTEERISM by members. Member involvement is paramount to our society's health and value to the peony. More hands-on participation by members directly relates to our ability to meet our mission. That said, APS would like to invite our members to become more involved in our very special society in any way they are able. Progression of membership is interesting to me... New members start out as 'users' and gain information, become educated and gain confidence with peonies and hopefully the society. How much involvement members experience is often dependent upon the connections they experience with other volunteers within the society and/or their own motivations. A few ask to become involved and connect quickly, others wait to be asked and still others remain users of benefits. APS is much more than a Bulletin, convention and a website with resources – we are a community which invites you to become a “peony nut” and help to spread the enjoyment of peonies. Ask not what you can do for yourself, but what you can do for the society and the peony – you'll find it fulfilling and make lifelong friends.

What's currently happening:

The following is an incomplete, but is an indicative summary of volunteer involvement in programs and initiatives our society works on.

- APS is reaching more and more people interested in peonies and has seen significant growth. This growth can be attributed to a number factors:
 - pandemic gardening,
 - social media exposure (thanks to our Social Media volunteers...**Steve Smith, Liz Best, Lynn Gessling, Craig Aiken** and participating **members**),
 - excellent content in the Bulletin (thanks to authors),
 - website options
 - focus on peonies by various media sources outside of APS
 - member involvement
- Volunteerism within the society by members has seen a large increase (around 1000 members). In the past, many of the programs and offerings from APS have been carried out by Directors. The increase in participation has helped APS to provide more options for members and the peony world at large. The varied perspectives, experiences, growing locations, interests and personalities of our volunteer members have provided a positive experience for all involved. I'd personally like to thank all volunteers for their efforts – no matter how small or large. Our society is better for it!
- The Minnesota Convention, which was planned for this year, was unfortunately cancelled due to pandemic concerns. Much work had been done in planning it and **David** and **Linette Sorrentino** deserve a big thank you for planning something that did not come to fruition. However, we can look forward to their expert planning for a convention in Minnesota in 2024. Thanks for the huge amount of volunteerism which Linette and David provide to our society.
- APS tested the waters with a hybrid virtual/in person convention this year.
 - We were able to make a few gardens available for tours (Minnesota & Wisconsin) this year, which were graciously hosted by: **Jill Stevens, Michelle Ovans and Becky & Keith Swenson.**
 - Zoom presentations were made available by: **Don Smith, Michelle Ovans, Becky Swenson, Harvey Buchite, Margery Daughtrey** and myself. Thanks for all of the efforts of these special volunteers who gave of their time and expertise freely. Additionally, a large THANK YOU to **Lois Girton** for assisting with the Zoom meetings management – we couldn't have done it without her. Lois is also responsible for arranging the well received "What's Wrong with my Peony? A Primer on Peony Diseases" meeting provided by Margery Daughtrey via Zoom in July – Thanks Lois!
 - We hoped to have video of gardens available via the website, but only one was submitted. We'll make sure to get this up later this winter, as this something new and is a bit more challenging than first expected.
 - A first ever Virtual Flower Show was held through the website and membership did an excellent job sharing their images. A big thank you goes out to volunteer members **Nick Maycher** and **Cate Crawford**, who managed the entire event. Participating members certainly enjoyed this option and provided many mouth watering and interesting images. Thanks go to participating volunteer members who submitted images to the show.
 - While the virtual convention did not involve the costs of regular onsite convention, there are expenses to be covered nonetheless. A number of members sponsored the convention through generous monetary donations and APS wishes to thank the following for their volunteerism in this regard: **Darcy Elliot, Lois & David Cahoy, Marcia Richardson, Mary Muellner, Jay King, Catherine Crawford, Patricia Holloway, Rita Thomas, Delia Egan, Richard Curie, Susan Buckley, Larry and Wendy Argatoff and Nate & Kimberly Bremer.**
 - Thanks to all **members** who participated in our first venture into virtual offerings of this type. You made the offerings a success and helped to fulfill APS' mission to "Support activities that improve the Peony".

- APS' website has seen a number of changes over the past year and an increase in traffic.
 - The Member Portal is being used more often by membership to acquire membership only information – great we love it!
 - The Hathi Trust Library is now accessible to members through the Member Portal. This resource allows members to view past Bulletins (up to 2014). Thanks go out to Director **David Michener** for spearheading and organizing this outstanding option for member use.
 - The five most current Bulletins may be read online, thus you can access it from any device which has internet capabilities.
 - Many new images were added to the online Peony Registry this year. Another thank you goes out to image donors helping to make the Peony Registry more complete. Thanks go to **members** assisting with images in this regard.
 - Worldwide traffic on the website (especially the Peony Registry) numbers in the 1000's each month. Again this helps meet our mission of "To provide education and support activities that improve the Peony." The winter months in the northern hemisphere see the most traffic with more than 30,000 visits to the Peony Registry in January, 2021. Thanks go to **Reiner Jakubowski** for providing outstanding registration information for use by the peony public.
- APS finances are in great shape after a bit of drop at the beginning of the pandemic. This coming year the BOD will begin researching possible options to support peony related research and programs APS may be able to support monetarily. **Kris Jurik** deserves a huge THANK YOU for her contentious work as treasurer and keeping APS in good financial standing and helping to fulfill its mission. Kris works many volunteer hours making contact with members, keeping the books, traveling to our tax advisor, auditing, working with other committee chairs, reimbursing members for materials and numerous other finance related activities. While we don't think of finances as an integral part of APS' mission, nothing could be further from the truth – monetary support and monitoring is required in order for programing needs to be fulfilled.
- The Seed Program saw record numbers of orders this past year. The program allows members to purchase a variety of seeds at low expense. Again this program supports our mission "To provide education and support activities that improve the Peony." **Scott Parker** chairs this program and carries out all work involved with distribution and management. Here again, **Kris Jurik** works with Scott to manage transactions. Thanks go to Scott and Kris for their continued efforts to support our mission!
- Numerous registrations of new peony cultivars continue to be submitted to APS Registrar **Reiner Jakubowski**. His work is done behind the scenes and requires careful and detailed work, which he does expertly. Peony registration helps to keep names in good standing with provenance, an increasingly important activity due to the increased popularity of peonies. Thanks Reiner!
- Peony auctions are popular with members and APS recently completed another successful opportunity. Peonies and other related items for APS auctions are provided through donation by members (often commercial members). While freely supplying outstanding cultivars and items, donors also pay shipping on their donations, making these generous members A1 on my list volunteers. These folks are often forgotten and deserve recognition for assisting APS to fulfill its mission. If you have the opportunity to thank them, please do so – this opportunity would not happen without them. Special thanks go to **Lois Girton** and **Jill Stevens** for managing auctions this year, while our program chair attends to other concerns.
- APS personal and plant awards have been rejuvenated! The committee is made up of **Steve Smith**, **Craig Aiken** and **Brandie Orchard**. Thanks go to these folks for their great efforts in highlighting great plants and special people to the peony world. Steve Smith, as chair, put in extra time arranging for medals to be provided to recipients of awards, which helps to commemorate those who make the peony world go round – thanks Steve.

- Award of Landscape Merit. No, APS hasn't forgotten this important program, but rather is taking a close look at how we can better make judging more efficient and user friendly to judges. One of the program's largest obstacles is getting judges to submit evaluations to make determinations for peonies to be awarded and ALM certification. Thankfully **Cory Tischman** and **Jill Stevens** will be taking a closer look at this in the off season. Thanks Cory and Jill, your work is much appreciated!
- The Bulletin has received many accolades over the past year. While it is always a work in progress, we can thank numerous people for its continued success. **Kim Bremer** serves as the volunteer Editor and works with an editorial group and authors. She puts in long volunteer hours to meet deadlines, provide interesting and diverse content and hunt down special features. Kim would like to thank her editorial group for their continued dedication to the society through the Bulletin. I'd like to thank Kim for her work to keep membership informed through its most visible member benefit. Group members deserving thanks are: Lois Girton, **Jill Stevens**, **Jerri O'Connor**, **Sharon Schmitz**, **Cate Crawford** and **Larry Argatoff**. If you'd like to join this welcoming group, please contact Kim – she'd be glad to work with you!
- Additionally, thanks go to **Lois Girton** and **Jim Sampson** for their continual work on the "Science Segues" part of most Bulletins. Membership is fortunate to have well informed and educated writers concerning these often complicated scientific pieces.
- **Kent Tretheway** heads up our Mentorship program. Kent works to connect members interested in specific topic with more experienced members. The program has been highly successful, but Kent notes more mentors are needed – demand is greater than supply. If you are able to assist as a mentor, please contact Kent. Thanks Kent for all arranging connections for members and providing educational opportunities.
- Membership management is carried out by member volunteers **Linette Sorrentino** and **Kris Jurik**. Linette contentiously records information from the website on a daily basis and provides information to new members or those requiring information. While the website records membership purchases it does not record data in a useful form for mailings and contacts, thus she keeps a comprehensive record at her home. Additionally, she provides membership reporting to the BOD for decision making and planning. Each quarter Linette assists Kim Bremer with mailing information for the Bulletin. Kris Jurik similarly makes connections with members who make payments and works with Linette to make sure all of the "t's" are crossed and members receive their paid benefits. Many hours volunteer hours are spent by Linette and Kris servicing our members. Your work is appreciated by me and membership as a whole – THANK YOU!
- **Cory Tischman** is APS' Recording Secretary. Cory expertly records all BOD meeting information and discussions. His detailed work in the form of meeting minutes is an invaluable reference resource in regards to APS leadership decision making. His fine work is available to all members in the member portal. Thanks Cory!
- Nominations and elections for the society are also overseen by **Cory Tischman**. On a yearly basis he searches for members which may be interested in a leadership position within the society. Management of profiles and communicating with possible leaders has helped APS immeasurably and I'm thankful for his efforts. If you are interested in a leadership role or think you can assist, please contact Cory – he'd love to hear from you.
- **Mike Miller** manages APS books and publications. Inventories and shipping are things he deals with most and works to get ordered information into member hands efficiently. Thanks for providing this behind the scene service to members Mike!
- Convention planning is carried out by different members and is a rather thankless job. Convention attendees enjoy their hidden efforts.
 - **David Michener** and **Alex Ford** (not a member) are responsible for getting the ball rolling on the Michigan convention, which you'll hear about as the year progresses. **Linette** and **David**

Sorrentino are now working on the Michigan Convention as their expertise in convention planning is needed.

- **Craig Aiken** is laying the ground work for a Central New York convention in 2023. This area of the United States is steeped in peony hybridizing history and has some outstanding historic gardens for touring.
- As noted previously, Minnesota will host the convention in 2024 after having to cancel in 2021 due to Covid. Linette and David have already laid much of the ground work for this.
- **Linette and David Sorrentino** oversee the Flower Exhibitions for all recent and near future conventions – a monumental amount of work. Their work involves making physical exhibition site plans, setting up exhibition structures, providing show schedules, educating exhibitors and supplying needed materials, recruiting volunteers and forming judging groups.
- This year's Gold Medal Peony is 'Joker', an outstanding herbaceous hybrid. More information concerning this fine peony may be found on the APS website.
- **David Sorrentino** serves as the Vice President of APS. His involvement within the society is far reaching, with involvement in the website, convention flower exhibitions, convention planning, society direction and serves as my sounding board for many decisions. He is not on the Board of Directors, but serves as a member on the Executive Committee. You'll find his finger prints on many of the society's programs and I wish to personally thank him for all he does in support of the society and my presidency.
- **Piet Wierstra** oversees APS' Commercial Member Meeting at conventions. While we not had this meeting for a couple of years, APS looks forward to one in Michigan. **Commercial Memberships** have grown to more than 80 and these members help to educate many people about the peony through their numerous business contacts. Thanks go to our commercial members as well for spreading the word.
- Hybridizers. Hybridizing has experienced a renaissance of sorts and we are seeing many new introductions come available on the market. A number of outstanding advancements have been made and the peony world is certainly appreciative of hybridizers good work. Watch for new introductions in the Peony Registry. Unfortunately not all peonies introduced to commerce are registered and this is a cause for concern – more on this in 2022.
- Members in their community. A number of our members host local garden tours and events within their communities which help to promote the peony. Additionally, we've seen a number of members contribute to other publications, promoting peonies! Great work and thanks go to these folks for their dedication.
- Lastly, thanks to our supportive membership. Few non-profits are supported completely by their membership and APS is lucky to have so many caring and interested members. With your continued participation and support APS is able to keep spreading the love of peonies.

Numerous other members have given time, talent and expertise to the society over the past year in other capacities and I'd like to thank them as well. My hopes are that I've not missed too many and that we all know volunteer efforts are not always recognized publicly, but are appreciated.

APS is something dear to my heart and I'm hopeful you, as members, are able to make connections and enjoy peonies as much as I do. This year has been challenging for many due to the pandemic and severe climate conditions. However, peonies can be a thread of hope we can all enjoy to forge forward.

Best Wishes for a great 2022 on onward,

Nate Bremer – American Peony Society President

Elections – Please vote through the Membership Portal if you have not done so already. Election balloting will close at the end of this meeting.