

President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina



Fellow Azalea Society members, as I assume the responsibilities of President it is with a sense of trepidation and confidence. That probably sounds odd, but let me explain. My fear and anxiety are on a personal level. I am faced with the daunting challenge of following in the footsteps of John Brown, Buddy Lee, Joe Schild, and Bill Bode, who have so successfully guided this Society during the past decade. They leave large shoes to fill, and I am humbled by the tasks that lie ahead.

My confidence stems from you, the members, who always rise to the challenge. I know that with your support the Society will continue to grow and fulfill its goals. These goals are to promote knowledge of and interest in azaleas; provide forums for sharing knowledge of hybridizing, propagation, and culture of azaleas; and my personal favorite, bring together those whose appreciation of azaleas forms a bond of friendship.

One of the primary ways we accomplish this last goal is our annual convention or family reunion. This year's reunion was hosted by the Northern Virginia Chapter, and it was spectacular. There were many highlights, but one of my best memories was eating lunch in the library of the Green Spring Farm Garden with Jane Newman. The stories she told were priceless.

Even though it was 12:30 a.m. Monday night (or Tuesday morning) when I got home from the convention, I had to dig out one of my old issues of *The Azalean* to read the article about Sue and George Switzer. In that same issue I discovered the registration form for the 2001 Asheville convention. This opened a flood gate of memories, and I realized that I began taking the first tentative steps toward this office by volunteering to lead the Copper Bald field trips at that convention. On those field trips, bonds of friendship developed that have remained strong ever since. On the Friday trip were **Donna and Joe Coleman, Mary and Bill McDavit, Tom Milner, Saleta Compton, and Jean Minch**. Those attending Saturday's trip included **Barbara Bullock, J Jackson, Lindy Johnson, Will Ferrell, and Debby and David Sauer**.

I sincerely believe that if every member of the Society could experience just a little bit of what we shared that day on Copper Bald they would be hooked for life. I have told many people in the ensuing years that I joined the Society for the plants, but I have stayed for the people.

Every time I think of an Azalea Society convention, I am reminded of an old quote: "Joy shared is joy doubled and sorrow shared is sorrow halved." This past year has seen some of both. Successful conventions, chapter meetings, field trips, flower shows, and good fellowship have taken place. However, the highs have been balanced by health problems and the loss of good friends. The Society lost three of our most devoted members this past year: **Mal Clark, Deni Stelloh, and David Sauer**. They were all pillars of the society and it now falls on all of us to further the society goals by following their examples.

How do we begin this task? Let's start small. If you are a member who has never gone to a chapter meeting, make it your goal to attend one meeting this coming year. If you are active in the chapter, invite someone you know to become a member, or make it your goal to attend the next convention. You won't be sorry. If you are active on the national level, take photos, write articles for *The Azalean*; send seed into the seed exchange; volunteer to serve on the board; or convince your chapter to host the next convention. If everyone does just a little bit more, we will all reap the benefits.

In closing, I would like to say how honored I am to serve as your president for the next two years. I know with your guidance and support we will continue to grow and develop as a society.

*In the end we can either accept things as they are
or accept responsibility for changing them. There really is no alternative.*

The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (*Ericaceae*).

Officers for 2008-2009

President — Aaron Cook
Vice President — John Migas
Secretary — Carol Flowers
Treasurer — Dan Krabill
Immediate Past President —
John Brown

Directors

Terms expire 2010	Terms expire 2011
Hale Booth	Dr. Joe Coleman
Ron Hooper	Eugene Stano, Jr.
Maarten van der Giessen	Dave Nanney

Chapter presidents
serve as ex-officio directors.

Chapters

Brookside Gardens (chartered Aug. 1979) William C. Miller III, <i>Pres.</i>	Ben Morrison (chartered May 1980) Harold Belcher, <i>Pres.</i>
Northern Virginia (chartered May 1980) Eve Harrison, <i>Pres.</i>	Louisiana (chartered June 1981) Dr. Allen Owings, <i>Pres.</i>
Tri-State (chartered Oct. 1981) Larry Miller, <i>Pres.</i>	Texas (chartered May 1989) Bart Brechter, <i>Pres.</i>
Oconee (chartered Nov. 1991) Ed Mellon, <i>Pres.</i>	Vaseyi (chartered June 2001) April Sanborn, <i>Pres.</i>
Lake Michigan (chartered May 2003) Phil Lanning, <i>Pres.</i>	Alabamense (chartered May 2005)
Southern California (chartered March 2007) Jim Jaeger, <i>Pres.</i>	

Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of \$25; life-membership for one or two persons at the same address is \$500. Members receive *The Azalean* and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society including those of the chapter with which the member affiliates. For information and a membership application, write to Carol Flowers, Secretary, 700 New Hampshire NW, Apt. 1011, Washington, DC 20037 or visit www.azaleas.org.