

President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina



Sometimes it is a good idea to get together and brainstorm ideas with good friends. I had that opportunity recently. Although the logistics of the meeting seemed simple at first, it turned out to be quite complicated. After a few false starts and missed directions, (I think **John Brown** and I actually passed each other on the road going in opposite directions) we were all seated around **Ed Collins'** kitchen table and our ideas began to materialize. Many problems were addressed, but the one main issue that kept coming up was how to increase membership in the Azalea Society of America.

It seems every President has struggled with this issue. Some, like **Buddy Lee**, have taken it upon themselves to become directly involved by providing gift memberships. Others, like **John Brown**, have involved chapters to help with mass mailings.

As our afternoon together progressed, I began to think of why some businesses have thrived during these difficult economic times and others have failed. In comparing my own membership in various societies to those successful businesses, I found one simple correlation: value. We all want good value for our money.

Armed with this realization, I compared the value of membership in various societies on a per dollar scale to the ASA. Our dues are lower than most other plant societies. In fact, of the seven plant societies that I examined, only one other has dues comparable to the ASA.

Leaving out the intangibles and intrinsic value of being part of the ASA family, I began thinking about the concrete values our Society offers. This exercise may seem simple at first, but it quickly becomes more complicated when at-large membership and inactive chapters are compared to active chapters.

So what do we get for our \$25 dollar membership fee?

- Every member gets four copies a year of our publication *The Azalean*.
- Every member has the opportunity to take part in local meetings, national conventions, and the seed exchange.

At this point I stopped, realizing that most of the other services offered by the ASA can be enjoyed without the cost of membership. Anyone can use the Society's Web site and Yahoo™ discussion group. Both are good public relations tools that increase our visibility.

As I begin my second year in office, I intend to focus on increasing the value of Society membership for every one of our members, while maintaining our reasonable membership rate. I have always welcomed suggestions from members on ways to better meet our Society goals. During the past year, many people have provided me with feedback, and I will ask our Board to consider action on several of these new ideas, including:

- We have many memberships from people who own a business related to azaleas and rhododendrons. We could offer a corporate membership that includes an ad in *The Azalean*.
- We could develop a column in *The Azalean* updating us when members who work or teach in the industry change positions.
- We should accept the fact that the responsibility for the growth and long

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 2009-2010

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) Greg Wedding, <i>Pres.</i>	Texas (chartered May 1989) Bart Brechter, <i>Pres.</i>
Oconee (chartered Nov. 1991)	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.

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▲ Vaseyi President April Sanborn presents the chapter's 2009 Augie Kehr Award to Bob Stelloh.

▼ Vaseyi President April Sanborn presents the chapter's 2009 Augie Kehr Award to Ed Collins.



unmilled live moss, run it through 1/4 inch hardware cloth.

During the business meeting, the chapter approved a \$500 donation to the Bullington Center. Awards Committee chair **Leon Pace** and committee members **Vivian Abney** and **Ken Majer** made presentations to two outstanding members of the Vaseyi Chapter: **Edward W. Collins** and **Robert T. Stelloh**.

Edward W. Collins was a founding member and past president of the Vaseyi Chapter. He is also a past president of the Philadelphia Chapter ARS, Pine Barrens Chapter ARS, and Southeastern Chapter ARS. He is also a past ARS District 8 director and was the recipient of the ARS Silver Medal.

In addition to maintaining his almost 8-acre garden, Collins enjoys hiking in search of native plants and presenting lectures.

Robert "Bob" Stelloh was the national treasurer for 12 years, and has been the ASA Webmaster since 1999. He was one of the founding members of the Vaseyi Chapter in 2001, and currently serves as chapter treasurer. He also served as registrar for the 2001 and 2008 national conventions hosted by the Vaseyi Chapter. He and his late wife **Denise** were honored to have their garden on tour for both conventions.

The chapter decided that since its name is Vaseyi to use only the picture of our native Vaseyi with the award. Thus, the award consists of a verbal commendation, a very nice print of the Vaseyi azalea from an original water color done by **Don Hyatt**, and a bronze medal.

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term stability of the Society is placed in the hands of amateurs, backyard gardeners, nurserymen, and educators—in fact anyone, whether he or she grows a single plant or a collection covering acres of ground. We must find ways to encourage a full and free exchange of scions, cuttings, pollen, and seed. We can begin by having a list where people can place cuttings and pollen they are willing to send out or desire.

- As a Society we can enthusiastically support the seed exchange and the Azalea Research Foundation. When the ARS Research Foundation started, most of the money was generated by Esther Berry's seed exchange, and it handed out \$500 awards. Just because the ARF is new and small, does not mean we can't make a significant impact on azalea research. New research will also provide scientific articles for publication in *The Azalean* and benefit the whole Society.
- Finally we cannot get to our destination without a long-range plan or roadmap. As one of my goals, I would like to explore the development of a Long-Range Planning Committee. Its first assignment would be to establish a set of goals for the next five to 10 years. Where should our membership and chapters be in 2015? Then the hard part: what actions are necessary for us to take to achieve these goals?

In closing, I want to extend my sincere greetings to all the membership along with heartfelt thanks for the honor bestowed upon me to be your President. I will continually strive to use the office for the betterment of the Society and meeting the goals for which it was established.

After my session with **John Brown**, **Ed Collins**, and **Bob Stelloh**, and reading several letters written by **Augie Kehr**, I am looking forward to beginning my second year as ASA President. Thank you all very much for one of the best years of my life. I look forward to what next year holds.

Your Azalea Friend,
Aaron Cook