

President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina



As a scientist, I have always been an admirer of Sir Isaac Newton. One of my favorite quotes from him is: "If I have seen further, it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants."

I think of this quote often as I perform my duties as President. I am indeed greatly indebted to those who have laid the groundwork for our Society. In spite of many obstacles, our Society has continued to march steadily forward. While other societies struggle, we continue to add new members and chapters.

There are many reasons why the ASA has become widely recognized and well respected in the plant society world. One factor that seldom receives the credit it deserves is our level of leadership at the chapter level. We are blessed to have a great group of chapter officers devoted to making their chapters successful. Many of these officers perform double duty by serving as national leaders as well.

A large number of men and women from various geographic areas and widely different backgrounds have served as national officers, directors, and committee members. All of these individuals have incurred personal expense and inconvenience for the love of our Society. Always vulnerable to criticism, and seldom applauded, they have served us well.

Good leadership is never accidental, but combines unique skills, a collective will, and a strong commitment to hold the interests of a society over personal interests. Now our Society's interests are once again threatened. I can think of no time in the past when we have been faced with more challenges.

Just a few short years ago, Buddy Lee wrote glowingly in his President's Letter about Auburn University's Azalea Evaluation Project at Camp Hill. He characterized it as a large collection of azalea cultivars planted in elevated rows with irrigation and pine trees providing filtered shade. Now the project has been scrapped and the plants are being offered free to anyone willing to rescue them.

On another front, new directives from the management of the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., could in one season undo 20 years of hard work. Employment positions are going unfilled and major changes are being discussed in the azalea areas planted on Mt. Hamilton. If no one intervenes, some of Ben Morrison's original hybrids will be systematically cut down and the stumps treated with herbicide. It will be a great loss, both from an aesthetic and a genetic viewpoint. The appearance of Mt. Hamilton will be forever altered and germplasm from Morrison's breeding work will be lost to future plant breeders.

The growth and standing of the Azalea Society of America is incontrovertible proof of how well our predecessors led. The giants on whose shoulders we all stand would have fought this. They may have lost out to declining revenues and changing priorities, but they would have gone down swinging. And so will I.

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 2010-2011

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

Directors

Terms expire 2011	Terms expire 2012
Dr. Joe Coleman	Jim Campbell
Eugene Stano, Jr.	Vincent Ciolino
Dave Nanney	J Jackson

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) Rick Bauer, <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)
Oconee (chartered Nov. 1991) Jim Thornton, <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.