Navigating the New ASA Website

By Paul Beck—Treasurer and Assistant Webmaster

When I originally established the ASA membership database on the Northern Virginia Chapter website in 2013, I knew that it was an ASA resource and should have been on the ASA website (azaleas.org), not the NVA Chapter website. At the time, the environment was not such that it would have been possible to provide a database-backed membership roster, which could be searched and updated by the members themselves. That environment has since changed, and in the fall of 2016, Dave Banks asked me to assist with the transition of the data to a new ASA website, in conjunction with re-hosting the site on a newer, more "responsive" environment. The term "responsive" simply means that the website will respond to differing technologies and screen sizes of the viewing platform; i.e., it will work and look well on your smartphone or tablet. Dave suggested the use of the WordPress as the hosting platform, since he had good experience with it, and it was extremely popular and widely accepted as the standard. Importantly, WordPress supported the use of "themes" to customize the look and feel of your website, and the current themes were responsive and would meet the goal to accommodate our increasing membership's usage of smartphones. Dave and I agreed to split the workload of creating a new website with WordPress, with Dave tackling the huge job of sorting through the old website and extracting the useful information (there was a lot of that) and converting it to work with the more modern website. I was to create the portion of the website representing interactive content, much of which already existed on the NVA website.

When I created the NVA website, I used a technology base and programming language which easily supported the concept of dispersed content management. We found it very useful to be able to delegate the maintaining and updating of content to various members acting in different roles. For example, individuals with the appropriate role could upload images and create/update azalea data. This concept worked so well that we determined that the new ASA website should support the same concept. It turned out that the WordPress platform, recommended by Dave Banks, was up to the task. As an example of how well this is working, the Legacy Project started by Rick Bauer, and originally hosted on the NVA website, has now become an ASA level project, and has gained much interest throughout the society. There are several Legacy Leads from various chapters of the ASA that are actively creating and updating valuable information on several Legacy projects. If you have not visited the new Legacy Project home page on the ASA website, I think you will be impressed by what our new leads have accomplished. There is a link to it on the top-level menu. Check it out!

This article will be an introduction to a series of future articles each explaining one of the interactive features of the new ASA website, along with some instruction and guidance on how to make the most of the website. We intend to continue the articles in future issues of *The Azalean*. In the feature listing below, the title of the section and the location of the menu selection will be shown. A brief description of each of the features is included. Starting with the next issue, I will dive into one feature at a time per issue, with appropriate instructions and screen grabs.

Membership Database

(About the Society→Members). The online membership database is a key feature of the new interactive content. Members can be searched for by last name, first name, chapter, state or country (or combination thereof). An individual's record can be updated by the member themselves, or by one of several administrators. When viewing a chapter listing on a smartphone, note that if your phone is rotated to landscape position the member's phone number appears, and that if you then touch their number it will initiate a call to that member.

Azalean Online

(The Azalean→Azalean Online). This content was also initially released in early 2015 on the NVA website, and has been fully ported to the new website. The 12 most current issues are viewable only by logged-in members. Older issues can be searched and viewed by anyone. The journal can be viewed (or downloaded) as a complete document by clicking on its issue volume and number, or individual articles can be viewed by clicking on the (Contents) link. In addition, back hardcopy issues can be ordered online and paid for with PayPal™. Thanks to Dave Banks, we have introduced a full text *Azalean* article search capability with Google Custom Search™.

Searchable Azalea Database

(Azalea Types→Azalea Database). This page was a key feature that drove the move to the new hosting platform and interactive database content. The core concept was to have one location for data, photographs, and other information about azaleas, and that this information would be searchable and integrated. The initial data load included all the azaleas on the NVA website with descriptions, characteristics, and photographs where available. The old ASA website had a huge repository of cultivar names and groups, but descriptions and pictures were not included (pictures were on a separate website, pBase). The cultivar names and groups have been imported from the old ASA website into the searchable database, but there is a huge need to populate the database with details and photographs.

Legacy Project

(Legacy Project). This content has been briefly described previously, and will be an in-depth article in the future. The

Legacy Project, currently led by ASA President Rick Bauer, has gained tremendous traction after being ported to the ASA website. Several new groups have been added to the project, and legacy leads have volunteered (and become very active) from the Texas and Central Carolinas Chapters, as well from the Northern Virginia Chapter, where the project was started. Each lead person has full control over their project with the ability to update any information and photographs on the home page, as well as all cultivar data, search criteria, and photographs.

Join Us

(Join Us, Renew or Donate). This page is the one-stop shopping location to join the society, renew your membership, donate, or sign up for a subscription membership. The new subscription feature, implemented last year, saves you time, saves the society expense of mailings, and is highly encouraged.

Renewal Time
Is Now!

That time of year, when your annual dues need to be paid, is **here now**. Dues are still $30 per year. A renewal reminder email was sent to all members (with an email address on file) in mid-November. Paper mailing of reminders will go out in mid-December. If you choose to not renew electronically, you may use the renewal form on the wrapper of this issue of *The Azalean*. This application form is also available on the ASA website, at the **Join Us, Renew or Donate link**.

As per the ASA by-laws, members who have not renewed by the end of February will have their membership inactivated. If you then renew at a later date, you will not receive any missed issues of *The Azalean*.

If you did not receive the reminder email, please check your spam folder. The email was sent using the new permanent treasurer's email, treasurer@azaleas. org. Please add this address to your contacts if you did not get the reminder email. Also, I may not have a valid or current email address for you, so please send me an email at the above address if you did not receive the reminder, and I will add that address to your record.

If you wish for your email address to not be viewable by other **members** (membership information is not publicly viewable) on our website, please let me know and I will mark it as private.

This year I am strongly encouraging the use of our new **subscription service**, via the PayPal™ credit card payment service. This will allow you to register your credit card with PayPal, and have your annual membership fees deducted automatically. Click on the "Yearly Automatic Subscription" accordion near the bottom of the **Join Us** page.

"Tax-Exempt" vs. "Public Charity"

By Paul Beck—Oak Hill, Virginia

The question about tax-exempt status has again been raised by one of our chapters. In the fall of 2016, I sent an email to all chapter presidents and treasurers outlining the process required to obtain "Public Charity" status. I will re-iterate that simple process below, but first I need to explain the difference between being "Tax-Exempt" and a "Public Charity."

A chapter can obtain **"Tax-Exempt"** status simply by electronically filing the very simple IRS Form 990-N "Postcard", providing that your average yearly receipts are less than $50,000. Being tax-exempt simply means that you do not have to pay corporate income taxes. You must, however, have an EIN of your own, and not be using the ASA EIN for bank accounts. In 2015, all chapters were instructed to obtain their own EINs and to cease using the ASA EIN on bank accounts. If you are still using the ASA EIN, you need to immediately take care of getting your own EIN, and update all financial instruments and accounts accordingly. If you fail to file the 990-N for three years, you will lose tax-exempt status, and will have to apply to the IRS to have it re-instated (and explain how you have put in place procedures to prevent that from happening again).

The distinctively different status of being a **"Public Charity,"** or a **"501(c)(3)"** organization is often (incorrectly) equated with being "Tax-Exempt." The main reason for a chapter obtaining public charity status is that contributions of cash, supplies, equipment, plants, etc. to the chapter may be deducted from the income tax of the person or company making the donation. This cannot be legally done if your chapter is simply tax-exempt. Also, chapter members using their personal vehicle to support chapter functions, such as delivering plants to plant sales, may take standard mileage deductions on their taxes as a charitable contribution. You cannot, of course, deduct mileage simply to attend chapter functions.

If you think having "Public Charity" status is a good thing for your chapter (and I think it is), you need to follow the two simple steps shown below. (Before attempting to file, be sure you have your own distinct EIN). The IRS has greatly simplified the process in recent years; the Northern Virginia Chapter was granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS less than a month after applying.

1. You must first obtain an account at **pay.gov** in order to pay the required $275 filing fee.

2. After obtaining the login at pay.gov, you can then file the very simple IRS Form 1023-EZ. On the lower right of the pay.gov home page is a link to the form.

The 1023-EZ is exceedingly simple to fill out; you may contact me if you have any questions.