

Website Redesign—Paul Beck

Paul Beck outlined the redesign of the ASA Website that he and Dave Banks as co-Webmasters have created over the past year.

Azaleas 101 Report

Rick Bauer also reported on the event superbly organized by the Arkansas Master Gardeners group and their leader, Janet Carson, and Gerald Klingaman, with help from ASA members Ronnie Palmer, Allen Owings, and Robert Thau. This first-ever introductory overview of azaleas and how to grow and care for them was attended by 70 people. [Photo 29] The objective was to introduce the large group of active Arkansas Master Gardeners to the ASA. To encourage them to join us, they were given a six-month ASA membership as part of their registration and will receive two issues of *The Azalean*. We are hopeful that they will renew memberships for 2019.

Charlie Andrews—Keynote Address

See p. 43 for Part I of the banquet presentation by Vice-President Charlie Andrews. Part II will be published in the Fall 2018 issue.

2019 Convention Preview— “History, Azaleas, and Sweet Tea”— March 14-16, 2019

Tom Johnson of Magnolia Plantation and Gardens near Charleston, SC, and President of the Rev. John Drayton Chapter gave a quick overview of the 2019 convention venues: Magnolia Plantation Gardens, Middleton Place, Mepkin Abbey, and a tea plantation, all near Charleston, SC. Most of the housing and dining arrangements will be centered in near-by Summerville, SC. Details are forth-coming in the Fall 2018 issue. Note that this is a relatively early timing for the convention, so be sure to make your plans early. Check ASA Website for updates.

Thoughts on the 2018 ASA National Convention

John Migas—Saugatuck, Michigan

As I reflect back on the ASA convention held in Little Rock, Arkansas, just a few weeks ago, I'm really glad to have attended. If it wasn't for Beverly Knight of Hazleton, Indiana, inviting me to ride along with her and husband Steve, I might never have registered.

Wednesday morning April 4th, I woke early to begin my 800-plus-mile drive. Little did I know that our temperatures were to drop down to 25°F, changing heavy rains to snow. After raining for the past 24 hours, snow had covered the roads. It wasn't until I reached the end of my road that I realized what was under the snow: solid ice. That's when I went right through the intersection and onto the main road. No stopping, no turning, no braking, no salt, no nothing. Good thing it was 4:00 a.m. Being April, Michigan State and County snow plow trucks had already been converted to road work vehicles and the plows were removed. So, we were on our own. My first 75 miles took me almost 3 hours of white-knuckle driving. I stopped counting after seeing 25 semis either jack-knifed, turned over, or in a ditch. Finally, the sun started coming up and I was now in Indiana without snow. I still had another 275 miles to get to the Knights' home. Talk about being wiped out.

As most attendees' experience, “registration day” seems to become an eternity of anticipation. As that day draws nearer, our minds seem to switch gears and all we can think about is getting away. Adding the thought of traveling to a new destination makes it even more exciting.

We, Azalea Society convention attendees, are a breed apart from most others. At this convention, we experienced cold, rain, winds, and even snow. Yes, we experienced snow for the first time that I can ever remember at a national convention. Not only did we experience Mother Nature as her finest, many blooms were yet to awaken. Stop after stop, we could only hope and pray for the sun to show itself, which it finally did on Day 2. Add all of this to the equation, yet not one complaint.

We attendees are a breed apart; we are at these conventions for each other. In most cases we only get to visit each other once a year, at these conventions. Rain or snow, blooms or no blooms, we'll be there. I miss seeing the members we have lost over the years, but our stories will last a lifetime. That's why the same members are there year after year; it's the stories that these conventions create.

One last thing to reflect on: I did sit in at the BOD meeting, attended the annual meeting on Saturday night, and spoke to several Board members. I walked away with a feeling of being proud about where this society is heading. We have a tremendous Board that really cares about the ASA, and those members are doing a tremendous job. I appreciate all of them and feel that they are all a “breed apart.”

John Migas was ASA President from 2011-2012. He grows many azaleas on his property and does garden design and installation.