

## Your Roving Reporters – Carolee Carter and Annie Stringer

### At the 2003 AVSA Convention

The **Baton Rouge 57<sup>th</sup> Annual AVSA Convention** was great fun. Show Chairman Elmer Godeny said at the first convention he attended several years ago, “we can do that!” And they certainly did. Cajun Country rolled out the red carpet, and we had tons of fun. The number of plant entries was not as high as in previous conventions, but the quality did not suffer.

Annie and I tried to cover as much of the convention activities as we could, but both of us had lots of AVSA responsibilities to attend to. I’ll let *her* tell you about our dinner at the famous Prejean’s Cajun Restaurant in Lafayette and other tidbits. Here’s a recap of what I learned this year at the various workshops and forums. Annie’s “take” on the convention follows.

Well not exactly follows – sort of cuts in and out! Before we jump into things – Annie here in the different type – to toss in my two cents. First of all, this recap is late because I was pokey. So don’t blame Carolee, blame me ☺ As you may recall from last year, Carolee takes WAY better notes than I do . . . that being said, we’ll try to go along in somewhat chronological order. There may be some names you don’t recognize, but that probably just means that you need to think about attending convention next year in Tucson, AZ!

#### Tuesday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>

Well, actually there’s not much to tell about April 22<sup>nd</sup> except that I made it to LAX and caught the red-eye to Baton Rouge. Actually, I changed planes in DFW and then caught a weensy little jet to Baton Rouge. At least mine was a jet – I think Carolee got a PROP plane into Baton Rouge! (Yeah, with a scarf, goggles and a helmet, says Carolee!)

#### Wednesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>

My Birthday!!! :-D

I got to the hotel early – around 11:00 a.m. or so and I was tired and needed a shower – taking the red-eye is great in terms of time savings, but you really need to be able to get into your hotel room . . . and of course I was not (not until 4:30). I had to schlep around my laptop and projector, but I dumped my suitcases with the bellman. Being a lucky girl, I ran into Olive Pratt, current Southern California Council Vice President (and a lovely person!) and her sister, Lois Hicks, in the lobby. We went and had some lunch in the hotel. Wait – let me tell you right here – the food this year was REALLY REALLY good. After my raw \$45 chicken last year, I was thrilled! Of course this meant that I really had to go to the gym (nearly every day and Leonard Re can attest to this because he saw me there multiple times, sweating on the treadmill). Sorry – I digress . . . ☺ Anyway, after lunch, Olive and Lois took pity on me and hauled me up to their room where I was able to take a nap. I only slept for an hour or so, but wow – I was a new woman. If you ever meet Olive or Lois – be sure to ask them about their other hobby – cross stitch! Wow!

The first official function that both Carolee and I attended was the Affiliate’s Meeting. And now, back to you, Carolee!

#### Affiliate Meeting

Bev Promersberger’s Affiliate Meeting is always fun to attend. She is very inventive and generally comes up with some thought-provoking ideas for affiliates to attract new members. Her role-playing in this year’s event was great because it emphasized what I know can work to attract new members. After all, her affiliate in Pensacola attracted 25 new members to AVSA last year. Her

philosophy is to not pressure them to join their affiliate but to subscribe and enjoy the *African Violet* magazine to learn more about growing. She knows that she has a better chance of getting them through the back door, and then once they get “hooked,” they will want to join a local affiliate. She and her members work their attractive AVSA/Educational table (that includes a plate of candy or cookies on it! And usually balloons!) every minute their show or sales are open to the public, and they don’t miss a chance to talk to everyone about their violets. She also had another great idea for all of our affiliates to use at this table. Get the public to vote for *their* Best in Show plant or design with a voting box, paper and pencils. Great work, Bev.

Bev asked Marion Hamtil from the Metropolitan St. Louis Council to share their secrets of getting new members as well, and Marion and her group use similar techniques. Their Council nabbed 17 new members last year. They give a blooming plant in a pretty pot cover to every member who joins AVSA and displays a plaque saying that.

Next year, she promises a program on how a club can make money and asks if anyone has any input for this to e-mail her ([promers22@yahoo.com](mailto:promers22@yahoo.com)).

Aren't you glad that Carolee takes such excellent notes? I know I am ☺ Kathy Lahti (I know you've all been wondering if she's related to the actress Christine Lahti, so I asked on your behalf. She's not.). Anyway – Kathy Lahti also spoke at this meeting and shared some of what her club does as well – members each donate a blooming plant so that when someone joins AVSA, they receive the plant. They also had some very cute “picks” in the shape of teddies, geese, a country girl, etc. that were painted (someone has a lot of time . . .) and very, very cute. Picks such as these can be purchased at Michael's or other craft stores.

Another idea that was shared was about your club's newsletter – it was suggested that we “spotlight” a different member in each issue. Additionally, Bev P. had some excellent handouts that were reprints from *African Violet*. I hope you all read the Affiliates' column every month – she really has some wonderful ideas and articles. The three handouts were “Happy New Year Affiliates” (January 1999), “More Ways to Attract New Members,” and “Educate, Educate, Educate.” Sorry, no dates on those last two.

### **Tour #7 Dinner at Prejean's**

After my nap I wandered downstairs and met some folks including Jenny Daugereau from the AVSA office, who was quite surprised to find that I was not 80 years old . . . I think might have to work on my phone voice ;-D I hadn't registered for this tour, but I really wanted to go – and Jenny was able to find me a ticket!

OK – do not miss this restaurant if you are ever in Lafayette, LA. It was worth every single calorie and I am not kidding. The bus ride to Lafayette took around 45 minutes or so, and Carolee and I were sitting up front. Also close by us was Yvonne Ozio, who knows the area, so we got a wonderful tour commentary as we drove. I had never encountered an elevated highway like the one we drove on. Very interesting. Well, we got to the restaurant and Carolee, Nancy Hayes, Leonard and Elaine Re, Cheryl Salatino, I, and a couple more folks were all seated together.

Since none of us was driving – cocktails, wine, and Cajun food ensued. There was a live Cajun band and they were great, and there was shopping!! (Always a plus for me!) I had the mixed platter, and besides the shrimp and other seafood, it had ALLIGATOR (kinda like chicken) and FROG LEGS on it. I even had a taste of catfish. I always thought I didn't really like Cajun food – too spicy. This is not true. I think you have to have Cajun food prepared in Cajun country. I cannot tell you how excellent it was.



Carolee, Cheryl, & Annie

Of course we had to have dessert and the guys sitting behind Cheryl and I had something that looked absolutely divine. Not being shy girls (can you tell from the photo?), we asked what it was. "Banana Cheesecake," came the reply. I don't even LIKE cheesecake – but it looked so wonderful (and it didn't have any chocolate – to which I am allergic) that I got a piece and made everyone at the table eat some (thus cutting down on my treadmill time the next day). Holy Mackerel, it was the best thing I have ever tasted! I'm not kidding! Then thanks to someone at my table – the Cajun Band sang "Happy Birthday" to me, and the entire restaurant applauded!! That was exciting!! After a trip to the gift shop (Mello Joy coffee and a "light" Cajun cook book for my hubby), we hit the road back to the hotel.

### Thursday, April 24<sup>th</sup>



Stork's Violets

7:30 a.m. – The Commercial Sales Room Opens!!! For many, this is the highlight of convention. What's for sale? What's new? Has anyone got that Vintage Violet you've been searching for? As always, the Sales Room was wonderful! Ralph and Olive Ma Robinson, the Brownlies from Canada, Paul Sorano, the Storks, Travis Violets, Shirley's House of Violets, Cape Cod Violetry, Pat Hancock, Belisle's, Dave Thomas, Bluebird Greenhouses – whom did I miss?

Oh wait, I think the question is, "what did I buy?" ;-D Actually, I was a pretty good girl . . . sorta. Well, at least I didn't buy an IGS stand this year, like I did last year! I came home with plantlets of Ma's Satin Flower, Creole Royale (an oldie), and Feather (another oldie that I've been coveting for years). And leaves of Alan's Fallen Angel, Garnet Halo, Buckeye Diamonds Are (it croaked, though), Buckeye Dresden China, Milang Skies, Rebel's Teddy Bear, Granger's Wonderland, and Pride of Columbus. I also came home with a Louisiana Lagniappe from the Installation dinner, and a Rob's Puddy Cat from the Judges' Breakfast. Wow! That's a lot, I'm afraid. . . ☺

Carolee, on the other hand, was hyperventilating. I had to totally restrain myself from buying ANYTHING! I mean NOTHING! This was sheer torture, especially since I had just sold my WHOLE COLLECTION at the San Mateo show the week before! Every time I passed by the room, a few more tears were shed. But, it was the best decision to make because I am moving cross-country from California to Florida the beginning of October, which means I'll be starting over. I've already chalked up some markers from friends to send me leaves once I get settled. But, in the meantime, this was the most miserable part of the convention for me.

Hey, Carolee, you got to judge the show! Please read on . . .

Judging the show is always a wonderful experience. You get to see the show before anyone else does! So, if you have it in mind to attend the convention in Tucson and you are a judge, then sign up. If you are not a judge, then sign up as a clerk. It is great fun. I also had the luck that Anne Nicholas asked me to help photograph the entries after the judging for the library requirements. Winston Goretsky, as usual, was our premier photographer. You see many of his photographs on the cover of *African Violet* magazine. Also there were other photographers snapping away shots for next year's CD. Last year's CD of the Washington winners was a big seller, and I'm sure this year's CD will be equally great.

After some time in the gym, and even more time in the Sales Room – it's really fun to just look around in there, 3:00 rolled around and it was time to get to work.

## Membership & Promotions Committee meeting.

Your own Roving Reporter, Carolee Carter is one of your newest Board Members. She's also the Chair of this committee – and she ~~reped~~ – uh, convinced me to be her Vice Chair. ;-D I won't go into great detail here, but we are carrying on the great work that Nancy Hayes started, and you will most likely hear from us in the coming year in some form or another! ☺

Which brings us back to Carolee and the:

## 2002 Washington DC Convention and New Introduction Slides

It was a great opening evening.

Everyone had a wonderful time on the various **Tours** scheduled during the week. **Jim Owens** was doing his usual superb job as tour guide, making sure that everyone got on the right bus and the right tour. I must learn to organize my time better next year, as I couldn't find time to attend any of them because of other commitments. (clearly Carolee had too much wine at Prejean's because she did go on that tour – I have the photos to prove it ☺)

**Nancy Hayes** gave us an amusing **slide show remembrance of the 2002 Convention in Washington DC**. It pays to behave at the convention because Nancy seems to have been always lurking around the corner for Kodak moments – and some of them were really that. It was wonderful to see the winners and new introductions from that lovely show.

## The Grower's Forum

The **Grower's Forum** is always a crowd pleaser. It's a great way to open up the convention. This year's panel was Rob Robinson, Pat Hancock, Doris Brownlie and Paul Sorano, and they had a lot to talk about. Here are my notes about questions from the floor, with apologies for any inaccurate quotes.

- *Do you alternate fertilizers?* Rob said if you have a healthy plant, it would flower. He uses a balanced fertilizer all the time, either 15-16-17 Peters or 17-17-17 Champion. Paul said he puts more emphasis on the nitrogen and uses a 20-10-20 mix, alternating every once in a while with a 15-5-15 formula. Pat said most people use too much fertilizer. She pours it through the plant and uses only 1/8<sup>th</sup> tsp. per gallon of water.
- *Is there still a problem with urea in our fertilizer?* Rob said that if you are using a fertilizer that has urea in it and your plants are looking good, don't change.
- *What about water that has a high pH?* Add 1 tsp. vinegar to a gallon of water. Doris has friends who use well water, but you need to test it often both before and after you use the fertilizer. Pat reminded everyone that when you add fertilizer to your water, it makes it more acid.
- *How do you grow columneas?* Paul said he gives them the same care as he does to the violets – same soil and light. They might like more light and can tolerate cooler nights. He cuts them way back in the fall after it becomes leggy.
- *How do you get a strep to bloom for show?* Rob disbuds so that the leaves will stay fresh and grow larger. It wants to bloom more than a violet does and tends to be more vigorous bloomers, taking only six weeks to bloom. Doris's "trick" is to grow lots of them and then enter the best that come into bloom.
- *What causes certain plants to have yellow leaves?* Pat said to check your pH. Once the leaf begins to turn, there is nothing you can do to reverse it. Rob said that some varieties will not like your conditions – period. Doris said that another cause of

yellowing leaves is soil mealy bug. Paul boosts the fertilizer on just that one plant, and Pat uses fish emulsion to help stop the yellowing from occurring.

- *I live in New England and have powdery mildew. I following everything that the books says without success. How do you control it?* Rob uses Neem oil ([www.neem.org](http://www.neem.org)) with great success. Paul used to use Milban but it's now off the market. He now uses Compass, which works well with a pinch of baking soda in a pint sprayer. Pat also switches her lighting system in winter and summer to equalize the temperature in her growing area. Someone from the audience offered the recipe of 1 part rubbing alcohol to 2 parts distilled water to control it.
- *What do you use to control thrips?* Avid was good, but now Conserve completely eradicates it.
- *Is AVSA endorsing Pro-Mix soil?* Joyce Stork rose to answer this question. She has been in contact with someone from Premier Horticulture (the producer of Pro-Mix) about a proposal to exchange the endorsement of AVSA for a quality potting mix designed specifically for African violet hobbyists who use constant watering techniques. The reason for wanting a more controlled mix is that some companies who produce African violet soil are not regulated by any guidelines. Only four or five states have any standards, which means that the remaining states are able to sell mixes containing any number of ingredients not required to be listed on the package. The peat comes from different bogs, and each producer makes adjustments in the amount of perlite and vermiculite that is added to it as well as those undesirable additional ingredients. The Premier representative is sending Joyce several products for evaluation, and then he will present AVSA's proposal to the Mulch and Soil Council. He does have a concern about needed production quantities and whether adequate stock could be sold initially to compensate for the development costs in a short period of time. This would mean that those who wick water would hopefully purchase this product to make it profitable to both Premier and, eventually through royalties, to AVSA. The same product would be sold across the country through such distributors as Lowe's and Home Depot. Price should retail around \$4 for an 8-qt. bag. AVSA will also hopes to negotiate a deal where clubs will be able to purchase it at the wholesale price for sale at their shows and to their members. Stay tuned to *African Violet* for developments.
- *Does vermiculite still have a problem?* No, some vermiculite is contaminated with asbestos, but it is construction vermiculite, not horticultural vermiculite.
- *What do you use for Algae?* Physan 20: 5 tablespoons to 30 gallons of water, or just a few drops to a gallon.
- *Does anyone drench their plants to remove fertilizer salts?* Rob said he didn't because it is too much work. Besides, he repots frequently and avoids the build-up. Another panel member uses 1 tablespoon of dolomite lime to a gallon of water as a drench.
- *How do you avoid haloing?* Doris said that some plants do this naturally. Try using 1 tsp. of Knox gelatin to 1 cup hot water. Boil, then mix with 1 cup of ice water and pour the mixture over the plants.
- *My blooms don't open and get dry. Why?* Answers were actually questions to the grower: How hot is it? How much humidity does your growing area have? How close are the plants to the lights? Try misting the plants.
- *I have "dinky" blooms. What can I do?* Paul said that he has the biggest blooms in the spring, but once summer sets in they lose their size and the color fades. Pat swears that by adding lava rock to her soil mix, the blooms increase in size. She highly recommended using it. She gets it in Florida, and her mix is 10 gallons of soil mix to 1 gallon lava rock and 1 gallon of charcoal.

- *How do you all get your plants to the show with so many blossoms?* Paul chooses plants with buds and puts them in the back of the greenhouse. If you put them in a cool spot they hold their flowers longer.

No more time for questions, we all headed back to our rooms.

## **Friday, April 25<sup>th</sup>**

All the learning starts to ramp up on Friday. Plenty of Presentations for all interests! Carolee and I attended some the same and some different – so here we go!

### **Presentation #1 – Hands-on Growing for Show – Richard Nicholas**

It was then on to **Richard Nicholas**'s presentation. Richard grows fabulous show plants, and this year they enticed him to host a seminar entitled “**Hands-On Growing for Show.**” I was lucky to get an audit seat (me too) because I wasn't sure I would be able to stay for the entire presentation. Everyone present for the “hands-on” experience got a shopping bag full of goodies including the plants they were to work on. I had heard about two items he uses with his repotting techniques, but after seeing them in action, I can't wait to try them out myself. He puts the plant to be repotted on a small Lazy Susan (Rubbermaid). That way, he can move the entire plant around easily. He also uses one of those gravy separators to water the plant because of the small size and nozzle.

Richard's special technique to perfect symmetry is his potting schedule. If he is bringing a baby plant to maturity, he pots up every two to three months. His goal is not to lose any outer leaves. Once the plant reaches adult size, he then repots every 4-6 months. He swears that his leaves and plant size are improved if you pot up on this schedule. Always remove any blossoms when repotting. Brush loose soil off the top of the soil (it contains fertilizer salts) and then slice off an appropriate amount of soil at the bottom. If you slice through the root stem, then after slicing, cut a bit more of the stem off up into the soil so that the stem doesn't sit directly on the bottom of the pot, which could cause rotting. If he is entering a plant in a show, he begins to disbud after the last repotting, or 4-6 months before the show date.

Leaf grooming plays an important part in his technique. He always uses the rule of three – diamonds – which an African violet's leaf pattern provides. If you break or take off one of the three leaves of the row, immediately take off the remaining two at the same time.

He puts a half-inch of perlite in the bottom of the pot and advises that you fill the pot with mix to within 1/16<sup>th</sup> inch between the top of the soil and the first petiole level. Moisten the soil after repotting, but don't water fully again for a couple of days and keep the plant away from the lights.

The potting sequence for miniatures/semiminiatures is that they begin and remain in 2-3/8<sup>th</sup> inch pots. Repot three months before the show. He calls his repotting method either a “hard” break or a “soft” break. The former is stripping leaves back to 6, and a soft break is cutting back to 9 or more. He uses the latter method especially with variegated varieties because there is not enough green to stabilize the plant if you break down to six leaves. He also alternates the breaks – every other time is a hard break and then a soft break, making sure that the last break before a show is a hard one. He does not use any perlite/vermiculite layer in his pots for minis/semiminis.

Another clever idea for rings for semi/s and minis is to cut them from small Styrofoam plates a little larger than the top of the pot. The ring looks like a big cutout “O” and is sliced at one end and then just slipped around the plant. Works much better than the regular rings because they tend to slip so easily on the smaller pots and won't work at all on those that are less than 2-1/2 inches.

He also touched a bit on how to propagate streps. He does not use soil mix but, rather, equal parts of vermiculite and perlite. He cuts the leaf down the center and removes the center spine. He then cuts the leaf in pieces long enough to fit into a sandwich-type plastic box with a lid, waters it slightly, then closes the lid and doesn't reopen it unless too much moisture accumulates. Once the babies are an inch long, he repots. He disbuds five weeks before a show.

It was a great presentation, Richard.

Absolutely. I really enjoyed it as well. A couple of things that stood out for me in this presentation:

- Not every plant is a show plant . . . you need to grow what grows for you.
- Pot up every 2 to 3 months until plants are full size, then every 4 to 6 months.
  - Pot Sizes: Small Standards - 2 ¼ 3 ½ 4 ½
  - Pot Sizes: Large Standards – 2 ¼ 4 6
  - Pot Sizes: Minis/Semis – stay the same each time
- That sandwich-type plastic box for starting streps looks excellent – I got one to try it!

Oh, and I tried the Styrofoam ring – but I must not have been paying really good attention because mine was a sorry sight . . . I'll have to try it again.

#### **Presentation #4 – 2003 Featured Grower – Shannon Ahlman**

I attended this one, and it was excellent – I hope I can read my notes . . . I really wanted to attend this presentation, because the first named African Violet I ever purchased, "Mid-America", (I still have it ☺) I purchased from Shannon. Although he doesn't ship violets any longer, he still has to take some of the blame for the wackiness that is now my plant room! My apologies to Shannon for anything I mess up here . . .

Shannon aims to take a show plant from baby to big in 10 months.

His basic growing conditions:

- Two rooms in the basement
- 5 plants to an 8' x 12' shelf
- 70° to 85° in the plant rooms 24x7
- Assorted watering systems
- Show plants are wicked
- Uses Cool White shop lights in fixtures that have the bulbs further apart.
- Makes his own potting mix and uses Grow Power time-released fertilizer in the mix.

#### **Shannon's Show Calendar (for Standards)**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Month 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with a good, large starter plant</li> <li>• Take off leaves to put down so you'll have sale plants at your show (use bloom booster fertilizer on these leaves)</li> <li>• Look for the 3-leaf triangle</li> <li>• Disbud</li> <li>• Pot up to a 4" pot – wick it</li> <li>• Lights on for 10 hours</li> <li>• Balanced fertilizer</li> </ul> |
| Month 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce lights to 8 hours</li> </ul>  |

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Month 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle of the month should be time to pot up to a 5" or 6" pot. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pot shallow in the pot.</li> <li>○ Don't pack the soil</li> <li>○ Use leaf support if needed</li> <li>○ Aquarium tubing around the pot edge will help prevent broken/damaged petioles</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Keep disbudding</li> <li>• Lights remain at 8 hours unless the plants look like they can go to 9 hours.</li> </ul>   |
| Month 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant should be letting you know if its doing well where you have it.</li> <li>• Don't move it around a lot, but move if you need to.</li> <li>• Keep disbudding</li> <li>• 8 – 9 hours of light</li> </ul>  |
| Month 5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for suckers</li> <li>• Keep disbudding</li> <li>• 8 – 9 hours of light</li> <li>• If you put leaves down in Month 1, babies should be ready to be potted up. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dome the babies for 2 weeks</li> <li>○ Still use the bloom booster</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| Month 6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pot up for the last time 4 months before show (that's now!)</li> <li>• Remove any yellow, damaged or non-essential leaves</li> <li>• Watch growth. If it's not growing, don't pot up.</li> <li>• If it's doing well, go to a 6" or 6 ½" pot</li> <li>• Remove any damaged inner growth as wel.</li> <li>• 8 – 9 hours of light</li> <li>• Babies go to 13 hours of light.</li> <li>• Continue bloom booster on the babies</li> </ul>   |
| Month 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the end of 7 months, use bloom booster fertilizer</li> <li>• Keep disbudding but leave the stalks long to encourage secondary blossom stalks</li> <li>• 9 to 10 hours of light</li> <li>• Keep disbudding the babies.</li> </ul>  |
| Month 8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disbud (again, leave an inch or so of stalk): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For variegates, 9 to 10 weeks before is last time to disbud.</li> <li>○ For green doubles, 8 weeks before</li> <li>○ For green singles, 7 weeks before</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 10 – 11 hours of light</li> <li>• Continue bloom booster fertilizer</li> <li>• On the babies, watch for suckers</li> <li>• 14 hours of light</li> <li>• Continue bloom booster fertilizer</li> <li>• Last time to disbud babies is 8 weeks out</li> </ul> |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Month 9  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove any damaged leaves</li> <li>• Back to balanced fertilizer</li> <li>• Wash all show plants if you can. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use vinegar solution to wash.</li> <li>○ Spray plant and let sit for 5 minutes.</li> <li>○ Get a second spray bottle of water and add 2 drops of dishwashing soap. Spray plant well.</li> <li>○ Use a natural sea sponge and gently sponge in the direction of leaf hair.</li> <li>○ Then rinse each leaf off</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Spray after the washing with Physan 27.</li> </ul> |
| Month 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At 4 – 5 weeks out remove any blossom stalks that are above the foliage</li> <li>• After that, 3 – 4 weeks before show, any open flower comes off.</li> <li>• If need be, turn the lights up an hour</li> <li>• For babies – 4 – 5 weeks out remove excess leaves.</li> <li>• 3 –4 weeks – take open blossoms off.</li> </ul>   |

Shannon, this was a great presentation! Thank you!

### **Presentation #6 – How to Use First Class Version 2**

I won't bore you with the gory details – since this was my presentation :-D But after a few technical difficulties, everything settled down and flew right. If you don't already have this program, I hope you will consider getting it. Joe Bruns has created a wonderful, user-friendly tool for violet growers everywhere. If you have specific program questions, please feel free to email me. [Annie97@aol.com](mailto:Annie97@aol.com). If I can't answer your question, I know who can ☺

And now, I've talked enough for awhile – back to Carolee!

### **Opening Dinner**

The **Opening Dinner** was beautifully staged. We had some great entertainment from a family quartet who played and sang lots of fun Cajun songs. Because we were on the heels of Mardi Gras – and that was the theme of the dinner – we were told one of our cheesecake desserts at each table contained the baby that is traditionally baked in the festive Mardi Gras King Cake. Well, everyone at our table started stabbing their cheesecake but me because I wanted to wait for my coffee. Then, I succumbed to peer pressure and stabbed mine. We then declared our table barren, while the table next to us said they had twins. We were really enjoying the moment when Annie passed me by just as I was about to put a piece of cake into my mouth and screamed, “You're about to eat the baby!” With that, we discovered the baby had been hiding in the whipped cream. The table was no longer barren. So, instead of eating the remains, I gave it a proper funeral.



Once the entertainment concluded, we were able to go into the show, and many were able to see the winning plants for the first time – this is always an exciting event.

OK, I can't stop talking . . . For the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, I have won the table centerpiece at the Opening Dinner!! I can't believe it. My baby was purple! I think Carolee's was green. And there was no cake stabbing at my place – the dessert was not chocolate, so I dug in! And yes, the baby was in the whipped cream :-D

I'm sure you've all seen photos in various places on line, so we won't go there, but I did man the AVSA table for an hour, where I had the pleasure of sitting with Kathy Lahti and got to ask her all

sorts of questions about how she grows her fabulous minis and semis! She is a charming, friendly woman – we had a great time – and we garnered at least 4 new AVSA members during our shift!

## **Saturday, April 26<sup>th</sup>**

### **Judges' Breakfast**

Next morning was the **Judges' Breakfast**, and it is one of my favorites. It's our chance to ask all sorts of questions that have been plaguing judges all year. We had lots of interesting comments and questions this year. Here's a summary of some of them:



Part of the Northern California Judge Contingent:  
Carolee, Byron Borck, Heather Borck, & Barbara Elkin

- *When should a Special Award of Merit be given?* It should be given to plants that were nearly Best in Class. A Best in Class might be considered for one if it nearly got Best in Show.
- *What about suckers when we see them?* If a plant has a sucker, it can't be judged. *Does that also apply to "basket" or "aerial" suckers?* Yes, but they are allowed in trailing varieties.
- *We judged a trailer, gave it a blue, and then later learned that the entry was actually three separate plants in the pot. What should we have done?* We all should be trustworthy and not try to deceive the judges. However, once the plant has been judged, the judge's decision is final. [It was later revealed that the grower herself innocently told her group that she had planted the three plants into one pot.]
- *There was a design in our show that used plastic straws as part of the accessories, and it was eliminated from being judged. Was this the right thing to do?* No, our rules only state that the plants can't be plastic. It should not have been eliminated.
- *Would a plant that has mottled or "birth-marked" leaves be marked down?* No. *Can a mottled-leaved plant be registered as such?* Yes, if the hybridizer wants to.
- *Can a judge be a member of a panel to judge their own show?* Yes, if no other judges were available. However, if they are judging a class in which they have entered a plant, that judge should step back and let the other two judges deliberate on the award.
- *How do we judge a plant that has curled leaves or leaves that touch the table?* There would be a deduction of points in each case.
- *What do the judges look for in the novel container class?* Generally, a container that is more solid in color that blends with the plant, not one that overpowers the plant.
- *At our show, the judging panel gave an entire class red ribbons. Can they do that? Doesn't at least one have to have a blue?* There is nothing in the handbook that says a class must have a blue ribbon.
- *How do you judge a trailer that has a beautiful head of bloom on two of the three crowns?* Deduct a third of 25 points.
- And the question and answer that received a standing ovation: *How do you feel about judges who don't design themselves judging designs of others?* If you don't do designs, don't judge them.

A great breakfast – and apologies to Bill if I misquoted him anywhere.

### **Presentation #7 – Growing Violets in the Humid South. Phyllis King**

I've been a fan of Phyllis King's ever since I moved to Florida, and since I am moving back there in the fall, I wanted to catch her program on "Growing Violets in the Humid South." She always

manages to literally stop the show with her award-winning plants. Here are some of the secrets she shared:

- She clips two corners of her Solo cups with scissors instead of using a soldering iron.
- She clips her leaves with scissors, believing that you scrunch the cells of the bottom of the leaves together if you do this. Old wive's tale, she says. Besides, this is much faster.
- Once her leaves are potted in her own mix with an inch of perlite in the bottom, she slips a plastic bag over the top, clips the end and then secures the bottom ends with a rubber band.
- She waters her leaves once lightly with water and a couple drops of Allegro or Superthrive.
- Soil mix must be extra light for the humid conditions in the south.
- She keeps her plants in small pots – using a 3-inch pot until the plant gets 9 inches in diameter before potting up
- She uses one warm and one cool light in her fixtures and keeps them on for 13 hours a day at all times.
- Two stands in a room is the maximum she says. Otherwise, the room will overheat. And, she alternates the light schedule between each stand to avoid heat build-up.
- She uses Greenshield instead of Physan 20 to eliminate algae from her pots.
- This is a great idea – she wicks with a different color of yarn each month of the year. That way when she picks up a pot, she knows exactly what month it was repotted.
- To label, she takes a length of Scotch tape, folds over a quarter-inch on one end and tapes it on the pot. She then writes the name of the plant on it with a permanent marker. When repotting up to a larger pot, she just takes the tape off and puts it on the new pot (she uses white pots).
- Her reservoirs are glass jelly or mustard jars, which raise the semiminis closer to the lights.
- After repotting, she doesn't fill the reservoir for 4-5 days to let the plant adjust.
- She uses Safers hydroponics sticky strips and uses a clothespin to attach them to the light stand to catch bugs.
- For gnats, she occasionally sprays lightly with Raid's House and Garden Spray. For mites and thrips, she sprays with a fine mist of Chipco and Avid, 1/8 teaspoon to 2 cups water and 2 drops dishwashing liquid, repeating once a week for three weeks.
- To avoid damp-off of leaves or plants, she makes sure to remove all the soil from around the neck and petioles.
- Her fertilizer is 3-in-1 by Schultz because it has everything in it she needs for her plants plus a fungicide and a miticide. To 2 cups of water, she uses 1/8<sup>th</sup> teaspoon.
- Twice a year she uses Captan to control powdery mildew using 1/8<sup>th</sup> teaspoon to 2 cups of water and 2 drops of dishwashing soap.

**Presentation #8 – Advanced Judging Skills: Species – Paul Kroll, with Barbara Pershing and Linda Golubski**

This was a very informative presentation. I don't have a great many notes because we received handouts. One in particular by Linda Golubski has great information on the growing of species. They prefer less light and cooler temps, and it's important to consider where they grow in the wild. For example, she mentioned that the water-species grow in the wild on rocky cliffs and along stream beds on top of debris – they don't like having their feet wet for any length of time.

The main things I came away with from this presentation:

- If you don't grow them, you shouldn't judge them.

- Species grow naturally, they can sucker
- Really change your hat when you go to judge species.
- Re-read the section in the Judges Handbook that deals with species to refresh your memory.
- And this great quote on Species from Bill Foster:

“You big boys wouldn’t even be here if it wasn’t for us.”

One other thing I want to mention here is a new book by Colin Watkins, conservation project fundraiser; Johanna Kolehmainen, University of Helsinki; and Leif Schulman, Scientific Curator, University of Helsinki Botanical Garden. It’s called, *The Wild African Violet: An Interim Guide*. I haven’t purchased this yet, but I plan to do so this week. This 52-page book helps the reader to identify all the species and contains descriptions, photos, maps and other historical and conservation information. It’s pocket-sized for easy traveling, and a portion of the proceeds goes toward the conservation of wild African violets.

Here is the ordering information – all prices are in US Dollars – and I don’t have any email or fax info.

Orders must be mailed to:

Worldstage  
27 Devonshire Road  
Cambridge CB1 2BH  
United Kingdom

\$17.50 per copy plus \$2.50 per book postage and packing.

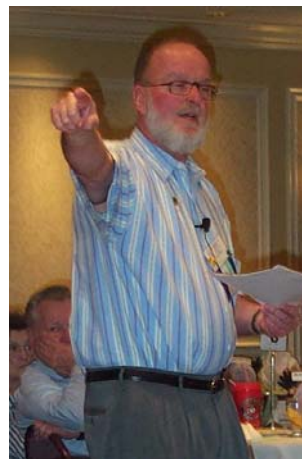
Checks are accepted in US funds or you may order with your Visa, AmEx, Mastercard, or Switch card.

### **Violets “On Line” meeting**

Chaired again this year by Mary Walbrick, this was a very informal gathering of on-line users. I was able to give my pitch for Membership & Promotion, and we all sat around and chatted about the various on-line groups that are out there. And there are PLENTY of groups to join! AV Connection and AVInternational are only two of the larger groups. So hunt around if you’re looking for a group to join. Head over to [www.yahogroups.com](http://www.yahogroups.com) and put “african violets” in the search field – you’ll be amazed at the number of groups that are active!

### **Luncheon and Auction**

This year’s **Auction** was booked solid. Because AVSA offered a package deal for the registration and banquet meals, everyone was at the auction. And what fun it was! Our auctioneer was our one-and-only Jack Wilson, who could easily just fall into a second career. There was just about everything to whet our appetites there: rare African violet books, china, new introduction leaves, Cajun food products, blankets, a beautiful Victorian doll with a crocheted violet dress among them.



Jack Wilson in motion

Our Russian friends, the Kalgins, were there, and Vladimir was bidding like crazy for books and rare plants that reached the bidding floor. One of the more exciting bids was for five new cultivars (two streps, a sinningia, a smithiantha and an episcea) that Dale Martens offered. Vladimir and

Byron Borck reached new AVSA bidding levels when the gavel finally fell at a whopping \$600. A beautiful afghan with African violets on it went for \$300, I believe. And my co-writer and friend, Annie, walked away with a stunning necklace made by New York AVSA member, Lillian Banchik, for \$25. She got lucky on that one. (way lucky and is it ever a stunner. I put it on immediately and wore it for the rest of the day. Everyone wanted to see it!) We were all exhausted after it was over.

### **Annual Membership Meeting, Open Forum and Raffles**

The business of AVSA is conducted at the **Annual Meeting** followed by the drawing for all the items offered at the Ways and Means table. Changes in next year's convention schedule were announced (which will be repeated in full in a later issue of the magazine). There was a short Q&A session. There were some lovely items at the Ways and Means table (a stunning quilt made by Nancy Hayes, home-made candy from Ozio, three boxes of three Hortense Pittman hybrids, to name a few), the drawing was held and the winners were thrilled.

The 2004 Tucson Convention folks were there with plenty of raffle items as well. I was hoping to win some little hanging pottery baskets, but no such luck this time. Convention 2004 will be April 11- 18 in Tucson, Arizona – the tours are already up on the AVSA website!! I hope to see you there.

This takes us to the closing dinner (where I was underdressed. Note to self: Pack a *dress* next time, Annie. How could it all be over so quickly? This is the third convention I have attended, and each one is more fun than the last. I think it's because I've begun to meet friends from around the globe when we gather at National. If you're a newbie next year, and you see Carolee or me, don't be shy! Introduce yourself ☺ This is part of the great fun of a National Convention. Meeting people, sharing your ideas, learning, shopping, taking in the sights – this is a wonderful hobby we share, and it's extra fun to share it at Convention!

### **Closing Installation Dinner**

Our last event was the **Closing Installation Dinner**, and it was sad that it was all coming to an end. With great thanks to the Storks, we all received their new hybrid, "Louisiana Lagniappe" as a table favor.



Entertainment was a superb Billy Joel-like singer. Kathy Bell presented the invitation for all of us to attend the Tucson convention in 2004 and her co-workers passed out traditional flowers from Mexico. Officers and Directors were installed and the evening was over!



We had done so much during the week; it was hard to believe how quickly it came to an end. I stayed at the hotel until Sunday afternoon and was amazed when Elmer took me to the ballroom where our show had been. It had been complete transformed overnight for a manufacturer's show with all their booths assembled. Life goes on, and Tucson is now less than a year away.

I headed home on Sunday morning. After a hilarious shuttle ride to the airport with Lillian Banchik, Dolores O'Sullivan and another friend from New York, we made it to the airport and got ourselves

checked in. We were all on the same plane to DFW (they had to fly through DFW to get to New York – Yikes!) and were ready to board when Dolores heard her name being paged over the intercom. Here's something you might want to know: You cannot take pH Down on a plane. Not as checked baggage nor as carry-on. It's a corrosive. Dolores had a big plastic bottle that she had purchased at Convention in her suitcase, which she had checked, and it was confiscated. So, buy that stuff at home!

Oh! I almost forgot to tell you – I found a “Mother” Beanie Baby in the airport gift shop. If you haven't fallen into the Beanie Baby craze, you might want to go and find this one – it's a yellow bear with two African violets embroidered on it! I snapped it right up as the perfect souvenir of a wonderful trip. I can hardly wait for Tucson and, like I said before, I hope to meet you there!

P.S. Carolee bought *three* yellow Beanie Babies at my local Hallmark shop. Two will be given away at some point to some lucky winner! They were the promo Beanie for Mother's Day, so check out your own store. You might find some left – and on sale! =)

See you in Tucson! Woohoo!