

# Convention Chatter

(Or, everything you wanted to know about the convention  
but didn't know whom to ask)

58<sup>th</sup> Annual AVSA Convention – Tucson – April 11-18, 2004

*By Carolee Carter*

Tuesday, April 13

With the taste of Baton Rouge and Cajun food barely out of mind, I was on my way to Tucson, the Sonoran Desert region and the 58<sup>th</sup> annual AVSA convention. It is the only place in the world where the giant saguaro cactus grows. As my plane landed in this 500-square-mile valley, I was awed by the mountain ranges surrounding it – and the magnificent colors of the desert – mauve, lavender, orange, yellow, sandstone, terra cotta and sage – were evident all around me. And it was DRY! I had packed extra moisturizer for the trip.



After a 15-minute shuttle ride, I arrived at the Doubletree, a beautiful hotel dressed in the desert colors. I immediately spotted fellow AVSA conventioners already assembling in groups to renew friendships. There was Bev Promersberger passing out flyers to attend the Affiliates meeting, Jack Wilson holding court in his animated fashion, Ruth Rumsey and Winston Gorensky probably discussing this year's photo requirements for the magazine. It was wonderful to see familiar faces again. That's what's so great about convention – especially if you go year after year. You can't wait to see folks in person with whom you have only connected by e-mail all year.

*Annie here! You'll notice that the byline this year is Carolee's alone. At the last minute, I was unable to attend the convention this year. I'm going to toss in a note or two along the way, but this year's reporting is in Carolee's capable hands (she always takes better notes than I do anyway ☺), and I'll be back next year. Take it away, Carolee!!!*

Okay – I warn you now. This is a pretty darn lengthy piece, but it *is* bookmarked. So, if you have a desire to jump around to read about a particular workshop or event, be my guest. The narrative is by day, so if you don't want to read the whole thing, just refer to your schedule or the purple pages from the January/February 2004 issue to find what you want and jump to that page.

Interspersed throughout are “news flashes” from our embedded correspondent and Tour Guide Extraordinaire, Jim Owens. He promises to give you a flavor of some of the tours you missed or help you relive the moment for those who went. He, too, couldn't be everywhere, but he has great stories to tell for those tours he did conduct.

Back to the story . . . I checked in and up to my room I went. I brought entirely too much stuff, I mused. My roomie, Nancy Hayes, had arrived the previous Saturday, so she had already made the place habitable. I unpacked in record time and dashed back downstairs to meet friends who were having an early dinner. After catching up on all the news before they took off for a meeting, I joined another table and this time had dinner that began with absolutely to-die-for corn chowder. (A lot of us lived on that soup all week!) Then, back to the room to collapse and catch up on Nancy's news. The Executive Committee had met for the entire day, so she was pretty well spent too. And, this was only the beginning of our week!

Since I didn't arrive until Tuesday, two tours had already taken place. Here's Jim's introduction and his recap.

**Dateline: Sunday, April 11.** We're in the land of Cowboys and Indians where the right tools put one in their land of dreams akin to heaven. After a long, uneventful but tiring ride down to Tucson Arizona, I'm rounding up thirty posse members for the ride south to Nogales, Mexico, and Tubac, Arizona, tomorrow to look for bargains and scout out the territory. Today, we are getting our tools ready for the ride. We will each have a canteen (water is necessary at all times in the desert to prevent dehydration), a Winchester 30-30 for protection and hunting along the way, a holstered Colt 44 for backup, and a good horse for the ride. We are set for the boyhood encounter of our dreams. Don't forget to put on your comfortable boots! We saddle up at sunrise, and the posse meets in front of the ranch at 8 am.

**Dateline: Monday, April 12, 2004 – Nogales, New Mexico & Tubac, Arizona.** The posse of thirty (seven Cowboys and twenty-three Cowgirls led by the ranch boss and an Indian guide), having filled their bellies with southwestern corn chowder from the chuck wagon (Javalina Cantina), rode south to Nogales, Mexico. One cowgirl, from the USA, forgot her identification (driver's license), and we had to return to the Ranch (Doubletree Hotel at Reed Park) to give her an opportunity to retrieve it from her bunk. She would not have been allowed back into the US without a hassle, if at all. Marian Hamtil forgot to remove her badge before we crossed the border, and while walking to the main shopping area was approached by a Hispanic gentleman who embraced her saying "Why hello Marian, I haven't seen you for a long time, don't you remember me?" while putting his arm around her. The ranch boss who was trailing behind her asked "Marian where is Nancy?" which eased the situation. Later, we asked Marion to remove her name badge so she would not become prey to desperados.

The posse spent three hours roaming the streets of Nogales bargaining and collecting goods from various vendors such as knock-off Gucci handbags, Ray ban sunglasses and Rolex watches. Winston Goretsky brought along a short rawhide whip, which caused the other posse members to tease him and warn his wife Laura that she had better switch bunkhouses for the night. The ranch boss regretted that he had not bargained for that western holster he fell in love with while in the saddle shop. You know the kind: it has ammo pockets all around with a leg tie strap from the old western movies. Then, it was time to remount and ride back to Tubac for lunch in the desert and ravaging the artisan settlement for other items of value for a good price.

At 3:30 pm, we packed the boxes in the wagon and rode back to the ranch . . . a tired posse from all the walking. Nevertheless, we returned from our venture happy that we had not lost a member of the posse and made such great purchases along the way.

Another posse of twenty-nine headed for the San Xavier Mission and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. We heard they had a great time.

**Dateline: Tuesday, April 13, 2004 – Tombstone.** Hearing that there might be a showdown between the cowboys and the Earp boys, the posse set off for Tombstone today. Along the route, we stopped at Boot Hill Cemetery to see the new graves and learn who was not able to survive the days since we were there. We saw a not-so-new headstone that read, “Here lies Lester Moore, took two rounds from a 44, no Les, No More.” Somewhat amused but, nevertheless, remorseful for Les and his family, we rode into town, arriving about an hour before noon. Bev Promersberger asked the ranch boss where he ate when he comes to Tombstone. He replied, “I always eat at Big Nose Kate’s Saloon but you can’t go there.” Bev asked why. “Because you’re a preacher’s wife,” he replied. Not taking that for an answer Bev pushed him for more information to which he replied, “it is a Bordello.” Well, Bev went there for lunch and they would not serve her (promptly), and she got up and left. Later, there was a big gathering of the posse, and we spotted Doris Brownlie from Canada sitting next to Doc Holiday, who had his arm around her. But, no big deal. Two hours later, he was shot in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. After all the excitement, the posse saddled-up for the ride back to Tucson.

### Wednesday, April 14

This is the day of the Board of Directors meeting. The Board nominees meet just prior to the Board meeting to get their “marching orders” – in other words, to learn the protocol of the meeting to come and what should be expected of them. The Board then assembles, and the meeting follows a strict Roberts’ Rules of Order pattern.

Items of business were conducted, and just prior to lunch, Joyce Stork rose to tell us about two exciting events which she would later reiterate at the Affiliates meeting (I’ll tell all at that time).

We adjourned to the “Meet the New Directors” luncheon, which is a nice venue for the Board to get to know the new directors better. It was our first chance to sample the hotel’s food – and it was delish. Especially the dessert – a sinful chocolate mousse cake. Joyce managed to grab an extra slice for her known chocoholic husband, Kent!

The afternoon was free, and I took advantage by traveling with friends Barbara Elkin, Byron Borck and Cindy Nofzinger to one of the best quilt shops I’ve ever visited. Whoops – I diverted some of my savings for African violets to fat quarters of some absolutely stunning fabric! Then, it was off to dinner at the Metro Grill for a fabulous meal. Byron – being true to his hybrids – insisted that we order a Sonoma wine, and it was indeed rather tasty. It was a fast meal, however, because exciting convention events were about to begin. Keep in mind as you read this tome that I have made some editorial comments throughout the document. I’ve noted them in brackets.

### **2003 Convention Recap and New Introduction Slides**

One of the best parts of convention – and a great way to begin the festivities – has become Nancy Hayes’ annual slide show of the previous convention. For those who

attended that convention, it is such a treat to renew our visual memory of that event, and for those who weren't able to attend, it is a wonderfully amusing way to catch the flavor of all the highlights – some a bit embarrassing – that they missed. Nancy is a wonderful commentator, and always adds the right remark to get everyone laughing at themselves. She works very hard every year to capture digitally all the best moments for this event, and, once again, she didn't let us down. She reiterated last year's request and asked that if anyone takes pictures they would like to share with her for next year's show, please send them to her. You'll find her address on the inside cover of *African Violet Magazine*.

### **Violet Grower's Forum**

On the heels of the slide show is the always popular "Grower's Forum." This year's panel consisted of Rob Robinson of Rob's Violets in New York, Doris Brownlie of Aca's Violet-Tree in Canada and Byron Borck, hybridizer of the Sonoma series. Jack Wilson had his customary microphone duties. Here's a sampling of some of the more interesting questions that emerged:

*How much does soil contribute to the growth of the plant?* Byron said it depends on what you classify as soil – peat, perlite, hydroponically? He found no difference, regardless of the method chosen. Doris reinforced those comments by saying that we should refer to it always as a "soiless" mix. Whatever mix you choose, they will grow if you feed them and take good care of them. Rob then told us that Olive Ma refers to her mix as "packing material" because when she brought her plants from Taiwan into this country for the New York show several years ago, she packed them all in vermiculite and perlite, and they passed right through customs!

*I live in a dry area. Would you tell me how I could increase the humidity for my plants?* Byron said he has 2,000 plants in his garage, and it is very humid in there [does that mean we all have to buy more plants?]. Doris mists her plants twice a day. Rob grows his plants on capillary mats, and because he grows so many, the plants themselves will sweat and produce humidity.

*My streps are dying from too much heat. What should I do?* Rob [who hybridizes the Bristol series] said that you should grow varieties that are more tolerant to the heat. Some of the older varieties are not. The Bristol series, Jonathan Ford's or Paul Sorano's varieties are improvements in plant stock, so they are much more tolerant of temperature differences than they were 20 years ago. He emphasized to not keep them "drippy soggy" all the time. Use 50% perlite so that you can water frequently and heavily without drowning it.

*How do you encourage a strep to get bigger?* Rob said that Olive Ma disbuds them to grow larger and more impressive leaves. The leaves stay green and fresh. Disbud as long as you need to and then let it bloom. Use scrapbooking scissors to trim damaged leaves so that they look natural. Byron added that you should keep the strep disbudded up to 16 weeks before a show. Rob said that the plant would bloom heavier and faster after this disbudding process. Use the same schedule as you use for your African violets.

*Would you discuss the different types of fertilizers?* Rob launched this discussion by saying that you do not have to use a high phosphorous fertilizer to grow beautiful plants. Anyone who tells you differently is wrong. I have never had a problem getting full heads of bloom and have always done it by using a balanced fertilizer [20-20-20 or something similar]. You do not need to change the fertilizer to make it bloom either.

Ralph continued by sharing a story about Olive Ma, who loves to experiment. She tried 30-10-10 to disprove his theory and found that everything stayed the same except that the leaves were even greener than before. Therefore, the result is that if you do not give your plant enough nitrogen, you are starving your plant. He added that he does not change his lights either. He has an eastern exposure and grows many of his plants without lights at all. Those that grow under lights are there for 13 hours. The minis and semi-minis are 10-11 inches from the lights; the standards, 18 inches.

*When I remove a blossom stem on my African violets, I leave a little nub in order to encourage more blooms to form alongside it. Will the same thing occur for the streps?* Yes, if you cut the nub short so you don't see it, but be sure you don't damage the area where the next stub will grow.

*I understand you don't use Superthrive®. Why?* Byron began by saying that he thinks it doesn't make any difference other than perhaps his leaves are shinier. The plant's success depends more upon the fertilizer you use, the water quality you have and the mix. Doris said that Superthrive® is a vitamin. She uses it and is afraid to stop it. She laughed and said that many Canadians use it to grow marijuana. Ralph followed up by saying he too used it on everything, and the plants looked great. BUT, he stopped because one side-effect it does have is a tendency to make the leaves a bit more brittle.

*What combination, wattage and how often do you change your fluorescent lights?* Ralph jumped right in with this one "It doesn't matter, and when they burn out!" Doris said that she uses many combinations but the wide spectrums do last longer. She agreed with Ralph that she didn't change them until they burned out. [Remember that Ralph and Doris are commercial growers and are not growing all their plants for show.] Byron ended the question by saying he uses two cool whites. He saw no difference except how the plant looks under the light. "Go cheap" is his motto.

*What fertilizer dosage do you use?* Ralph said that rather than give a dosage, read the label and follow it. As a sideline to the question, Byron mentioned the coir mix [which is very porous] that he developed and which worked well for a couple of years. Suddenly his plants stopped blooming, and they were growing smaller. He had been top watering. "When you use your fertilizer, you need to take into consideration how you water. If you top water, you are continually flushing it away."

*Rob, we've heard there is a scented streptocarpus. Tell us about it.* "It smells like mothballs – but it is pleasant," he replied.

*How did the Bristol series get its name?* Rob replied that they named them after the city where their shop is located – Bristol Hills.

*I have a freshwater aquarium, and when I change the water in it, I use it to water my plants.* Byron cautioned continuing to do this because the pH levels in an aquarium go up and down depending upon what you feed the fish.

*What is the main cause of yellowing leaves?* Ralph said, “repot – if the roots are happy, the plant is happy.” Soil mealy bugs, too much light, an old leaf or fertilizer lock-up could also be the cause.

*How do you get rid of those darn gnats?* Let the soil dry out.

This just about concluded the longest-ever Growers’ Forum. It was obvious that the group could have gone on and on. It was just the thing to get everyone’s adrenalin going for the next three days of hectic activity.

**Dateline: Wednesday, April 14, 2004 – Kartchner Caverns.** The discovery of Karchner Caverns was the focus for today, so several exploratory Cowgirls and Cowboys headed south of Tucson once again to see this great wonder of nature. The Caverns are the second largest known in the United States, superseded only by the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. The formations in the caverns were beautiful and spectacular. Interestingly, everyone was misted with water before entering the cave. This procedure keeps hair and other matter stuck to you rather than transferring it as lint to the inside of the cave. Each night, the walkway is ‘washed down’ to keep it in its natural state. So, the bats will have a natural environment when they return in the mating season. Once the expedition came out of the cave, the group spotted a roadrunner. They don’t really move that fast and tend not to go very far, but we all managed to lose the Kodak moment since we could not bring our cameras with us into the cave. Having managed to see the surrounding terrain, we remounted and trekked back to Tucson.

#### Thursday, April 15

Whenever I attend a convention, I always send in my request early to Bill Foster to volunteer to judge the show. Volunteer – wow. If you’re a judge, who wouldn’t want to be a part of judging the best show of the year? Plus, you get to see the show before anyone else does! That’s a BIG plus for me.

We all gather at 8 a.m., and Bill then divides us up into panels. Some years you have many volunteers, and you don’t have an opportunity to judge more than a few classes. Other years, your panel could be asked to continue and judge more if the process is going slow. They try to have all of the panels complete their part of the process in an hour or so. Then, the big job begins – judging all of the top awards. They are selected by a panel of master and senior judges. This can take hours – sometimes well into the afternoon, as it did this time.

So, even though we have had a first peek, we still don’t know the winners!

### *African Violet Boom in Russia*

During the time I was judging, the first panel discussion was going on, and, darn it, I was going to miss it. Vladimir Kalgin was giving his first presentation at AVSA entitled “African Violet Boom in Russia” complete with a PowerPoint presentation of photos. Joyce Stork (bless her) took notes from the session. Here’s what she said:

“Vladimir Kalgin gave a very interesting presentation on African violets in Russia. Among the photos he shared were scenes of Russians, in heavy winter coats, buying violets in outside markets. He had one picture of a long line of people waiting outside a door. He told the group that a few years ago we probably heard that Russians used to wait in lines to buy food. That has changed. “Russians don’t wait in line any more, except to see African violets!” The shows there often include activities and crafts as well as educational talks for the public. One photo showed people sitting at a table making pictures of violets with beads. Vladimir also shared many photos of the incredibly beautiful Russian hybrids, as well as photos of the breeder who has done the work. There are not many variegated foliage, probably because they do not do as well in the growing conditions of many homes. It was a wonderful presentation.”

When I was through with judging, I had a chance to catch up with some old friends from California for an eat-on-the-run lunch, because we wanted to be sure we were at the commercial area when it opened at 1:00. Because I had moved cross country late last year and divested my household of most of my collection, I had my Wish List tightly gripped in my hand and converged into the salesroom with the throng of other hopefuls. Commercials were well represented this year, especially since they had to travel such a long distance with their plants: Lyndon Lyons, Rob’s Violets, and Kent’s Flowers, of course. Belisle’s also was there as well as Shirley’s House of Violets, Dave’s Violets, The Velvet Leaf, Violet Perfection, Violet Perfection by Gini and IGS with their wonderful light stands. Every table was mobbed three deep. A cartoon vision emerged from my brain with all of these people at a sales table, and plants, soil, blossoms, pots – everything flying up in the air while a little spry lady emerges from between all the legs with a wide smile on her face holding a perfectly formed African violet in her hands as she cries “I Got It!” If you sit in the hallway outside the salesroom for a few minutes, you really get the full picture. Dozens make a mad scramble back to the hotel room with arms loaded with boxes of plants – and then they return in a few minutes jogging down the hallway back to the salesroom to get more.

I did my share of damage to my pocketbook, but I kept reassuring myself that it was okay because I had just moved and was restarting my collection. Still, I bought entirely too many plants! Don’t we always?

I spent the balance of *my* afternoon in committee meetings, and then it was back to the room to change for the opening dinner.



The convention planners took a risk with our opening dinner – but it paid off big time. They held it as a buffet outside. The weather was glorious – just couldn't have been better. Had it been a day later, we would have been buffeted by high winds.



But, this was the only event during our stay where the hotel miscalculated. They had no idea what big appetites we had! We were like carnivorous animals! Everything was here: ribs, chicken, beef – with all sorts of veggies and salads. And pies, cookies, cakes. A feast for the eyes! However, they ran out before the entire crowd could be served. They quickly scrambled and restocked the food line, but, unfortunately, some of us did not get any dessert. (Our waistlines thanked us later, however.) Some of us dressed for the occasion, and there was a real Southwest feeling in the air – especially when the wonderful Mexican band arrived to play for us.



The centerpieces were gorgeous – beautiful 10-inch cactus gardens with most of the cacti about to bloom. They were set in attractive glazed terracotta bowls with a Southwestern theme. I lusted after it but wondered how one would ever get it home. When they announced the location of the winning “seat” for the centerpiece, “lucky” me won it! (Okay – I’ll deal with the transportation issue later, I mumbled to myself.)

It was a festive occasion and a great kick-off to the convention. Susan Hoffmann, who always does such a stellar job every year amassing so many awards, spilled the news of the winners, and we all then left the starry night to enter the showroom. The “oohs” and “aahs” were definitely audible as we all drifted through the aisles looking at truly beautiful specimens.

I spotted the lovely awards table where the Best in Show winner stood exhibited by Susan Hapner of Chesterfield, Missouri. The miniature **Persian Prince** just beamed with pride and was perfectly framed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Best in Show, Rob’s Monkeyshines, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Best in Show, Suncoast Lavender Silk.



One of the most amazing plants to make it to the show – and win Best Other Gesneriad – was *Sinningia douglasii*. [See photo in Dr. Price’s presentation summary.] This plant was at least 2-1/2 feet tall with little blossoms dangling from it. Dr. Bill Price grew it, and he drove from Vancouver with it on the back seat – blossoms jiggling with each bump! I would have been a nervous wreck.

Time to call it a day – we had another big one ahead of us.

**Dateline: Thursday, April 15, 2004 – Bisbee.** Today, the ranch boss was able to secure the services of an Experienced Cowboy who worked on a cattle ranch and participated in cattle drives to replace the Indian guide. We saddled up and rode off on the trails along the San Pedro river valley, which had been traversed by the Mexican General Cortez and the Apache Chiefs Geronimo and Cochise many moons ago. It was a long ride before we arrived at the Queen Mine in Bisbee where we boarded mine cars for the venture into the mine. The shaft was about 5 feet high and only wide enough to keep one from hitting the sides of the tunnel. This was no place for claustrophobics! Inside, we saw many minerals, especially copper deposits left from the mining effort (70% of the copper mined in the US comes from this mountain chain). We marveled that it took 3-½ years to mine this huge deposit using a pick and hammer. (Today, with the 500+ wide loaders, it only takes 90 seconds to mine an area this size – after blasting the rock using Apache Powder’s dynamite, of course. Apache is the largest supplier of dynamite in the United States.) The temperature is a cold 47 degrees in the mine. In another mine 3400 feet deep, the temperature is 105 degrees. (Why you ask? Because it is closer to hell, I suppose.) Mules hauled the ore out. Each mule pulled six cars of ore. If you put a seventh car in the chain, the mule would balk, which was the beginning of the first union in the country. Miners worked 10-12 hours a day boring, basting and working with chisel and hammer to loosen the rock with ore. As we emerged from the mine, Cowgirl Kathryn Bieritz approached the Ranch Boss to report her husband, David, had been left in the mine. (Yours truly, the Ranch Boss, was inclined to ask if he was insured and suggest we throw a stick of dynamite in as we said a blessing. But, seeing the panic on her face thought better of joking about it.) David shortly reappeared on the surface with another group and all were relieved.

We then descended on the town of Bisbee situated in a valley surrounded by mountains on each side (actually the city itself is on a mountainside) to see what treasures we could bring back. Then, we remounted and set out for Tucson. Back at the ranch for dinner, the Ranch Boss noticed people photographing the back of his shaved head. During the day, he had been taking off his hat for short periods to absorb some of the sun’s rays, but it seems the hole in his ball cap had placed a nice tan in a different pattern on the back of his head. He was immediately inducted into the Indian tribe and given the name “Half Moon.”

### Friday, April 16

The show opened at 6:00 a.m. to those registered so that they could take photographs before the public arrived. I chose to sleep in a bit longer while roomie Nancy sped down to the showroom to freshen up her blossoms in her designs. I am sorry to say that some failed to follow suit through the next two days, and the designs were not as fresh as they were when they were judged. [It’s always an unwritten rule – no matter whether you win Best in Class, a blue, red or white ribbon, you always put on a good face every day. Every blossom in the design should be as fresh as when it was picked because your guests – the public – are seeing them for the first time. Off my soapbox.]

### **Affiliate’s Breakfast**

Becoming a hit with convention-goers is Bev Promersberger’s Affiliates Breakfast/Meeting. The room was packed. You can always easily spot Bev. She wears a different, distinctive hat every year. [I have to remind myself to take a picture next

year!] Bev is non-stop when it comes to nurturing our affiliates. I know of few who spend so much time all year long ensuring that a wealth of valuable information reaches both the affiliates and those who view affiliate-related information on our website. Attendance to this event could be by either having breakfast or just attending the meeting. I was lucky to be seated next to Hattie Baggett, whom I have always wanted to meet. She is a lovely lady.

The affiliates are the backbone of AVSA, and Bev represents each one of us. She started her program with a very clever icebreaker involving three volunteers, who didn't know that she would dub them "three goofy growers" at the end. She then launched into some business at hand; namely, ensuring that your affiliate's dues are current. If not paid, your affiliate listing will disappear from the website. She reminded everyone that if you need to make any corrections regarding your affiliate information on the website, do not make those corrections yourself. You must notify Bev first so that she can delete the current entry from the system. She will then reply to the affiliate, and the new information can then be entered. Unfortunately, the system works that way.

Bev announced that next year's topic will be Publicity and asked that if any of us had ideas to share to submit them in advance. She still needs slides depicting different affiliate activities, so if you have any, please send them to her.

This morning's program was about ways to increase your treasury outside of having a show. Several participated with ideas like having yard sales once or twice a year, entering the horticultural exhibits at your state fair, selling plants as an adjunct to the fair, and white elephant and silent auctions with items brought back from the convention.

Ideas for your local meetings were raffles at each meeting with an extra raffle ticket given to anyone who brings a plant, or having roll call at the beginning of the meeting with each member being required to bring an African violet blossom or give 25¢ to the Treasury.

Show ideas were next: Display a decorated basket competition at state shows. Have every club enter one, judge them and then raffle them off. Sell leaf and plant starter kits. Charge a fee to pot leaves. Divide your sales tables into variety sections with signs depicting the plants in each section. Establish a Maternity Ward or Baby Factory where leaves, leaves that are potted, and leaves with little plantlets are sold. Offer to pot leaves for a price. Require that each member donate five plants to the show sale or contribute \$10 to the Treasury. Purchase a small plant stand and raffle it off. Publish a cookbook of your member's favorite recipes and sell it for a dollar. Raffle a quilt or a kit of AV supplies. All of these ideas are worth exploring.

### **Advanced Judging Skills**

I sped off to the "Advanced Judging Skills in Design" program that Paul Kroll, of New York design fame, was conducting. He began by saying that judging design is subjective and all designers must be thick-skinned. [Well, I'll have to agree with him on that.] His

first words of advice concerned the interpretation of the schedule. Here are some of the points he made:

- When you read the description of the design category, you don't need to hit it with a baseball bat but just give a hint of suggestion.
- He described the basics of design and said that you can see elements, but you must "feel" principles.
- When working with mechanics in a bubble bowl, we all know that we need to hide them, but you don't need to use five inches of sand or pebbles to do it.
- The focal point doesn't mean dead center. [I love this one.]
- Non-blooming Gesneriads are great as accessory plants for container gardens.
- If Christmas lights illuminate your shadowbox, your blossoms are likely to wilt.
- As arrangements get smaller, scale and proportion really become important.
- Remember, if the wings of the niche you are using are the full depth allowed in the schedule, the interior of the niche will be a bit dark, and you should adjust your material and background accordingly. Some designs that really look great in full lighting are just lost in some of these niches. So, be aware of the lighting in which you will display your design.

He illustrated his talk with many slides, and it was a very interesting presentation.

### **Auction Luncheon**

It was then time for the Auction Luncheon. This event has really become quite a "must attend" affair. Every year, the items offered get better and better, and the amount raised for AVSA skyrockets. Edna Rourke does a phenomenal job of assembling everything, and we are all excited about seeing the entries for the auction just prior to the lunch. This year was no exception. An African violet quilt, a hand-made beaded necklace, newly released African violets from Hortense Pittman, an autographed copy of *Our African Violet Heritage* by Anne Tinari, a violet quilted bed throw, new releases of various plants from other hybridizers, a collection of rare African violet books, a couple of African violet prints from England – plus dozens of other items, including the pièce de résistance [to be explained later] were on display. While Auctioneer Jack Wilson always does a magnificent job at these and other AVSA functions where he is moderator, he really gave us a treat this time. He revealed that he actually went to auctioneering school this past year! He had all of his "Yup" assistants strategically situated around the room – and the action began. "Wait – just a minute," Dr. Bill Price says as he saunters up to Jack. "You forgot our uniforms" as he whipped out a toilet-seat cover, poked open the hole in the middle and ceremoniously draped it over Jack's and his own head. A Kodak moment if there ever was one.



The auction quickly worked up to frenzy. I had been “commissioned” by Annie to bid on the hand-made beaded necklace that New York AVSA member Lillian Blanchik had made. I joined in the bidding after I scoped the competition and aggressively waved my number in the air at each number jump. Annie had given me a top bid limit, and we were getting close. All but one dropped away as we inched up the dollar mark. My competitor (Barbara Fuller) stopped at \$90, I bid \$95, keeping my fingers and toes crossed that I had bluffed her out, and then I heard the magic word “Sold.” Whew! My limit had been \$100, which caused Barbara to groan when she later found that out.

*Annie here! I want to tell you that my new Lillian Banchik original is another stunner, folks! Not as great a bargain as last year's, but well worth the \$95!*



More bids. The lap robe went for \$125, Anne’s book for \$50, the Pittman plants for \$45 each, the quilt for \$120, violet earrings for \$30, and on and on. We were all in the throes of the auction spirit.

Then came the biggie, courtesy of Vladimir Kalgin – 95 leaves of 50 different new varieties from Russian hybridizers – the photos of which Vladimir had shown at his presentation the day before. We all held our breath as Jack laid down the rules. The first bid would be for one leaf, and the bidding started. It went on and on and on until at the “Sold” call, the bid had escalated to \$66! One leaf! It was Libby Golubsky from Bluebird Greenhouses raising her number. Hmmmmm, I thought. That’s interesting.

The bidding then took a twist. Each bid now would be for a bag of five different leaves. The bidding again started, and the bids rose quickly. Libby was bidding; others were too. And when it stopped, the five leaves were sold for \$110 to Felicia Throop, formerly from North Carolina and now from San Diego. Here’s where the story gets interesting. The rules of the auction were that whenever there were additional items in the set of whatever was being auctioned, the buyer of the first set had the option of purchasing the remaining pieces of the set at the same price. This rule, then, apparently applied to the leaves. Felicia wanted to know how many sets remained. Several of us scrambled to count them out in sets of five while Jack continued auctioning other items. When we announced to Felicia that there were 16 additional sets of five leaves, she said “Sold!” The bill came to \$1,760. Get out that checkbook!

I talked with Felicia later to find out why she did it and what she planned to do with them. She said she is giving all the leaves to Libby, who will grow them into plants. Libby will then ship one of each plant to Felicia, who, in turn, then plans to hybridize them from each other! And, she plans to name them after her cats! I asked how many cats she had. “22,” she replied. So, it looks like we will not only have a distributor for the Russian hybrids through Bluebird, but we will also be anxiously waiting to see what the next generation of the Russian hybrids will look like! It was really an exciting moment. Vladimir video-recorded the whole episode,



and I'm sure his friends back in Moscow will be ecstatic when they hear the story.

In total, the auction raised almost \$6,000 for AVSA. Great job!

### **Hands-On Design**

Next, I was off to see what was going on at the "Hands On Design" presentation that Flo Naylor and Ann Wang were giving. I arrived at their "classroom" just as the 29 participants were receiving their bag of goodies to be used for their design. I heard Flo say that the rule of thumb for a design in a niche is that it should fill 3/4<sup>th</sup> to 7/8<sup>th</sup> of the height of the niche. She urged all the designers to experiment with plant material found near their homes. "It is amazing to see how different some items look after drying out," she said. "You get a whole new perspective." I thought of my huge box of "goodies" that I have been collecting over the years. It is invaluable when it comes to getting inspired.



They supplied stacks of dried material at the front of the room. After sharing some of their basic design tips, they put everyone to work. It was a flurry of activity, and it was interesting to see a) what people chose to work with, and b) how they implemented the design principles into their finished product.

Later, Flo and Ann displayed all of the designs from their two presentations in front of the meeting rooms on the first floor, and they drew lots of attention.

I went back down to the showroom, took a few more pictures, helped on the Membership table, bought a few more plants and then returned to my room to change for *this* evening's festivities.

I missed Leonard Re's Growing to Show panel discussion today. Drat!

### **President's Reception for the Board of Directors and Gaslight Theater**

First, I was off to Janet Riemer's reception for the Board of Directors, which is always a good event to connect with folks that you've just been missing all week. Local Tucsonans did a great job of providing and setting up all the refreshments and food. Several of us could stay only a half hour, however, because the bus was loading to take about 65 of us to the Gaslight Theater for a show.

The theater is decorated vaudeville style, and the tables were cramped but cozy. We all sat in the same general area, and we ordered our food and drinks. Prior to the play, we were entertained by the "band," which consisted of a honky-tonk piano player and a percussionist. Wow, did that piano player tickle those ivories! She had us all stomping, clapping and merrily singing along. The play, "Prince Valiant, or Surely You Joust!" was a wonderful spoof, and reminded me of the days of the Monty Python's Flying Circus. It



was very funny. There were even vaudeville intermission acts that kept us all laughing. Last, the finale was even more music followed by celebrating birthdays and anniversaries in the audience with a final mention that the African Violet Society of America was present. Well, you can imagine the whooping and applause by all of us. Because they couldn't serve the ice cream treat to everyone, Jim Owens was singled out and given a huge hot-fudge sundae, which he devoured all by himself with relish!

We were home by 11; I was asleep by 11:15. I'm wearing out now!

### Saturday, April 17

Up early again . . . this time for the Judges' Breakfast, which started at 7:15!!! The possibility of appearing in my pjs briefly crossed my mind. But no, I didn't.

#### **Judges' Breakfast**

I look forward to the Judges' breakfast. I always learn something that I didn't know before, and I love to hear the questions. It's extraordinary how rules get twisted out there in affiliate-land. Bill Foster, ever the gentleman, announced the names of those who have reached the Master Judge level and then led the discussion. He announced that if anyone is considering a teaching school to be sure to register it on time. The rules are stated in the handbook. He also asked that if you are ordering a Standard Show Award package that you please state if you want the rosettes or not, and, if so, which rosettes you are requesting. Otherwise, they have to waste time and money to contact you to find out. He added that while the rosettes are still \$5 per collection ordered, that price will increase to \$7.50 per collection beginning January 2005. Then the questions began.

*I've seen designers use that clear gel in their underwater containers instead of water. Is this allowed?* No. While it's a creative idea, an underwater design says "under water."

*Explain why a terrarium received a blue ribbon when it had a succulent planted in it.* Succulents are sometimes hard to spot, and some judges don't recognize them. Or, they just choose to ignore it. That doesn't make it right, of course. If it is not a succulent but looks like one, I'd suggest that the designer write a card to explain what the plant is.

*If a succulent or cactus is used in a container garden, should it be eliminated from consideration, or should points be deducted for unsuitable material?* It should not be judged.

*I noticed that twigs were used in one of the dish gardens in the show. Are they allowed?* The handbook states that you can use them as an accessory, but you can't plant them in the soil to make them look like a tree.

*A designer in this show got a red ribbon with the notation that the blossom color fades into the background. Was that too drastic? 40 points are allotted to Design. Something else must have happened to cause the judges to take off twenty points. I'd advise all judges to make sure that their comments reflect the points that were deducted.*

*What if a judge refuses to write comments? I would not ask any judge back to judge my show who refuses to write comments. The grower learns more from comments on the cards than anything else. He continued to illustrate his point by relaying a story about a design created by Hortense Pittman years ago that failed to achieve a blue ribbon. The only comment on the card was "keep trying."*

*I was part of a judge's panel where one of the judges insisted that the clerks step far back from the panel. Was the judge correct in asking them to keep their distance? I always invite the clerks to step forward to learn, and I encourage all judges to do that. He added that judges should be kind in their remarks because you don't know whether the design you are judging is the clerk's design or even one of the judges' designs. Paul Kroll rose to share a comment from Dale Martens that he always keeps in mind – "I always talk as if Bill Foster is on one shoulder and the exhibitor in on the other." Good words, Paul.*

*I was visiting a show and the highest-scoring plant in one of the collections was a miniature, but the Best in Show award went to a standard in another collection. How could this happen? The highest scoring plant should be the Best in Show plant regardless of its size. If the judges don't follow the handbook, don't invite them back. If you let something go, then it tells the exhibitors who follow that this is okay to do.*

*If a trailer has three crowns and only two are blooming, how do you deduct points? 25 points are allotted for Quantity of Bloom and is determined according to the variety as well as the number of blossoms. If the third crown has no blossoms, you could deduct up to a little over 8 points, or 1/3 of the total.*

*I've seen baskets of dried, twisted wood used as a natural garden container. Is this allowed? Technically, the designer is using a natural product, but this design should have been eliminated from consideration. If you accepted this, you should accept a clay pot. A natural garden is one that is formed naturally like lava rock, a seashell, or driftwood. The schedule should be written to state "not manufactured from natural material." Then there was a lengthy discussion about gluing naturally formed items together to enhance them, which Bill finally concluded by saying the materials glued should be exactly the same material, and the sections glued should not be obvious to the eye of the viewer.*

*Then some silly questions: How tall do you have to be to be a Master Judge? Mary Walbrick quickly jumped up and shouted "4 feet 10 inches!" And here's one: If someone added a judge's ribbon to their badge, could you get in trouble? Duh.*

*How is it possible for a standard variegated plant to be chosen Best in Show when another standard plant with green foliage is given a Best Standard award? You can't.*

It was suggested that the same panel should judge all collections so the same thought process is conveyed in the points.

*What do we do about leaves with birthmarks?* You can count off points as a marred leaf, but if you know that this is a characteristic of the plant, be kind.

*Do senior judges get an updated card when they renew?* Senior judges get a gold card and do not get another card unless the card is lost.

*Can there be a separate collection class for semiminiatures and miniatures; i.e., two classes, not one?* No, there is only one collection class, and it cannot be separated on a local schedule. If it were to be separated, it would not conform.

Another illuminating breakfast session. Thanks, Bill.

### *Compatible Gesneriads*

I had been waiting to see Dr. Bill Price's presentation ever since I saw that fabulous *Sinningia douglasii* mentioned earlier. He did not disappoint! Joyce Stock introduced him by telling us he lives in a "living terrarium" and then introduced the "charming, handsome, excellent specimen of man – Dr. Bill Price." Blushing by the introduction and the resultant applause, Bill launched into his presentation with a wonderful slide show depicting all the plants in his beautiful home, including that *Sinningia douglasii* that I mentioned earlier. He's like a kid in a candy store. He wants to grow EVERYTHING! And his plants are amazing. Here's some general information he shared:



- All gesneriads are fibrous rooted. Rhizomes and tubers are stem adaptations for food storage, surviving seasonal drought and propagation.
- The key to soil mix is to keep it light. Bill's mix is 1/3 each reconstituted New Zealand sphagnum moss pellets, coarse vermiculite, coarse perlite and some dolomite lime and bone meal.
- He uses a variety of fertilizers at 1/4<sup>th</sup> strength weekly of the recommended dose. Everything gets the same fertilizer.
- He waters twice a week with lukewarm tap water and only uses fertilizer in one of these waterings. He allows his gesneriads to dry out slightly between waterings, just slightly more than *Saintpaulias* like.
- He tends to underpot and prefers shallow pots like Azalea pots or bulb pans. However, the *Kohleria* species are fine with overpotting.
- When he's not growing by natural light, he uses fluorescent tubes with either cool or warm whites or a mixture of cool white with a Gro-lux® light. His timers run 12-14 hours per day.
- He keeps his winter temperatures between 61-72° and in summer between 65-81°.

Bill then launched into a stunning slide display of his plants and recommended some of his favorites: *Aeschynanthus humilis* (which used to be called “hildebrandii”), *Columnnea hirta* “Light Prince,” *Columnnea mortonii*, *Columnnea linearis*, *Corytoplectus cutucuensis* (the pronunciation of which rolled off his tongue like butter!), just to name a few.

- He said that Chiritas preferred cooler temperatures and like to dry out a bit between waterings.
- Episcias prefer warmer temperatures and constant root moisture and grow well under fluorescents. He suggested you remove the stolens to achieve a large single plant.
- Gesneria prefer extra lime to the mix and must never be allowed to dry out.
- Nemantanthus make beautiful basket plants for bright windows and flower better when pot bound. *Nemantanthus fluminensis* is one of his favorites.
- He had a number of stunning Petrocosmeas, which do well with lower light at the end of the 2-tube shelf. They also need to dry out between waterings, and in the winter, keep them cooler and even drier between waterings to promote better flower production. He advised not to grow them on wicks.
- Streptocarpus grows well under tubes or natural light and prefers slightly cooler conditions than *Saintpaulia*.
- Achimenes make a spectacular show of bloom when grown under four tubes. He suggested that you plant several rhizomes per pot, and when they are several inches tall, prune them back to 1-2 nodes to encourage branching. Keep them moist while actively growing, and in the fall, let them dry out, cut off the top growth, store the pot in a cool dark area and restart them in the spring.
- Gloxinia does well with higher light (4 tubes) but will flower under two tubes. He loves *Gloxinia lindeniana* and *Gloxinia sylvatica*.
- Kohleria prefer high light – 4 tubes or a bright south or west window – and prefers to be *overpotted*. Keep the plant moist because the rhizomes deteriorate quickly if kept too dry.
- Smithiantha definitely has a dormancy period. Leaf cuttings taken in the fall/winter tend to produce rhizomes, while cuttings taken in the spring/summer tend to produce plantlets. They tend to look best when grown as a single plant per pot. After the main flower spike has finished, prune back to encourage secondary branching and additional flower stalks.
- Sinningia prefer 4-tube lights, but some of the smaller growing varieties do well under two tubes. Plant tubers at or just above soil level so you can easily tell when new growth starts. Some miniature species do well with wick watering, but larger species tend to prefer slight drying out between waterings. If they go dormant, keep them under light and do not water until growth restarts.

He mentioned a dozen or so more gesneriads. All were fascinating specimens. It was an excellent presentation, and everyone went away gaining much more knowledge about our *Saintpaulia* cousins.

### **Growing African Violets in the Arid Southwest**

Simultaneously in another meeting room, Ruth Loomis was giving a presentation that was attended by everyone who lives in an arid climate. She shared her secrets on growing humidity-loving African violets in the arid Southwest. Her plants prove that she has successfully found measures to compensate for their dry heat. Here are a few tips she shared with the group:

- If growing in windows, be careful of eastern exposures, as the plant can easily burn. Use a sheer curtain between the window and the plant.
- Be especially aware that variegated varieties are very light sensitive and can lose their variegation if they are too warm or receive too much light. Move them to the lower plant shelves and place them at the ends of the lights.
- Wick water to provide a constant supply of water to the plant so that it does not dry out quickly. Make sure you keep your potting mix light with perlite. Leach the plants once a month to avoid a concentration of fertilizer from accumulating in the plant, and avoid letting the wicking container fall below half-full because the fertilizer is concentrated in the remaining water.
- Use pebble trays to provide more humidity, or place the plants over plastic grating with their wicks hanging through into the fertilized water. Physon 20 helps prevent the formation of algae in the wicking containers.
- Keep leaf cuttings in clear shoeboxes with covers or covered with plastic wrap to retain humidity until they sprout plantlets. Or, put each planted leaf in a baggie. In either method, you should not have to provide additional water, but be sure that you do not get a lot of condensation forming within the box or the plastic bag.

From the looks of the plants grown by the local folks, they are doing a fine job of following Ruth's sage advice.

I, meanwhile, had started to speed off to the Violets Online meeting when one of our AVSA folks stopped me to ask if I brought my camera with me. I did, and they directed me to meet "the lady in the wheelchair" in the showroom. I went over and introduced myself to 100-year-old Vera Bolek, who was been escorted by Sharon Akridge. Vera had grown African violets for years when she was younger. She had been so excited that an African violet show had made its way to Tucson. She was a charming woman. I asked her what she thought of the show, and she replied, "It's all so beautiful; it's a wonder I haven't lost my breath." I made sure the Tucson folks got her address so that they could send her a reminder of their next show.

### **Violets Online**

Back to the "Violets Online" meeting. This room was really tucked away, but I finally found it. Unfortunately, attendance wasn't what Marjorie Bullard and Mary Walbrick had hoped. There were only a half-dozen or so there. They spoke of many things: John Cook's illness and recovery, how to better promote AVSA within the groups, as well as

the news that Optimara will not be renewing their patents on their plants once they have ended.

Joyce Stork was there to advise that the AVSA Board had spoken about integrating the various Internet groups into AVSA through a special membership. Because no membership dues are collected, it is possible for Internet groups to call themselves AVSA affiliates without any real tie to the society. She continued by saying that because AVSA's non-profit status can be threatened by certain activity (particularly political), it seems necessary to establish a new membership category that respects the unique relationship that AVSA has with Internet groups but which can be revoked in the event that a group is actively involved in politics. This necessarily requires a fee to make it legal. The plan is to charge a minimum membership fee of, say, \$10, which would not include a magazine but would cover the cost of office mailings. The details are yet to be worked out, but she wanted to learn how the groups felt about the idea.

Joyce also talked about a funny idea of involving Ellen Degeneres in African violets. Mary and Marjorie will be writing about this in the group lists.

The afternoon workshops were equally as interesting.

### **Fighting Bugs**

Always diligent about fighting pests that attack my plants, I was interested in hearing local expert, Dr. Carl Olson, talk about his methods. Dr. Olson is a very animated speaker and really involves his audience with his enthusiasm. He is an advocate of not using any chemicals to treat any maladies that affect plants. While he admitted that his area of expertise is *not* African violets, he knew enough about the pests that attack them and offered some sage advice on how to deal with them in a non-chemical way.

He first said that in order for any pest to thrive and multiply on our plants that the food has to be there. How healthy the plant is will determine if you will have an explosion or just a trifle outbreak that you can deal with easily. So, the question that should be asked is "what habitat am I supplying for these creatures to thrive? Don't get mad. Don't freak out and yell 'I gotta kill it.'" He continued with a few tips.

First, to avoid problems:

- 1) Buy healthy plants in the first place;
- 2) Isolate new plants for 30 days;
- 3) Thoroughly wash hands and equipment when working with plants before moving to the next group;
- 4) when repotting, use sterile soil;
- 5) Inspect plants regularly; and
- 6) Remember, careless use of insecticides can damage your plants.

Management alternative suggestions:

- 1) Discard severely infected plants;

- 2) Prune infested, dying or dead parts;
- 3) Hand remove larger bugs (if they're on your plants, they're not going to eat *you*);
- 4) Knock off small insects with a brisk water spray;
- 5) Use a mild detergent as a water wash;
- 6) Use a hot water dip for cyclamen mites.

He then launched into some non-chemical remedies for some common problems:

- 1) Aphids – water wash dip or alcohol swab;
- 2) Mealy bugs – water wash dip or alcohol swab, isolate and repot. Discard severely infested plants;
- 3) Spider Mites or any predatory mite – water wash dip; and
- 4) Thrips – water wash dip. Disbud for six months.

For bothersome, but who cares insects:

- 1) Ants – repot, remove mechanically.
- 2) Fungus gnats – till the soil, let it dry a little longer than usual or just repot the plant.
- 3) Springtails – dry the top of the soil.

There are new aesthetics in the world now. He realizes that African violet growers hate thrips, but his motto is “how can nature be an eyesore?” We need to change our opinions about bugs. Every pesticide he has looked at brought him to the same conclusion – don't use them. They have limited effectiveness and eventually the pest becomes resistant. Just ask yourself “why did this bug pick this plant?” What is the damage? Are there any benefits?

[While I enjoyed his presentation, and in theory agreed with what he had to say, I left muttering to myself – “this will never fly.” We're too much into doing whatever it takes to keep our plants pristine. However, diligently following his methods to avoid problems and using some of his alternative methods just might keep us from unnecessarily pulling out that spray bottle of chemicals.]

### **The Joy of Growing Trailers**

In another room, my friend, Martha Spyridon, was learning all about trailers from expert Shirley Sanders of Shirley's House of Violets. Here's what she shared with me:

When Shirley is choosing a trailer, she chooses one that has already produced three crowns (that way she can be sure). She feels that you should grow a trailer in a pot that you will eventually want to show the plant in (i.e., a 4- or 5-inch pot). She puts her starter plants into a 3-inch pot right from the beginning, lines them with a coffee filter before adding the mix, and wicks them.

In order to produce a stunning show plant, she disbuds until 6-8 weeks before a show. [Wow, I've *never* disbudded my trailers; I'm too chicken. Maybe I'll try it this year.]

If a plant becomes too leggy [and we all have had *that* experience, haven't we?], Shirley says it's very difficult to fill in the centers. It's best to take cutting and start new plants. Also – and all you newbies out there, hold your breath – Shirley says you can chop off that entire trailer right at the main neck leaving just the root system intact. Tent the plant, and within six weeks, you should see multiple new crowns sprouting. And here's the last neat trick: to make a tent, use a plant ring and tape three or 4 skewers to the underside of the ring. Insert the skewers into the soil and then tent with clear plastic.

Shirley ended her presentation by talking about some of the hybrid trailers and surprised many by saying that the wonderful trailer “Cirelda” is a sister to “Linda Darnel.”

### **Annual Membership Meeting**

It was then time for the Annual Membership meeting. It was well attended – way above the required 50-member quorum. After the perfunctory meeting duties were accomplished, the Nominating Committee presented the slate of new directors for the coming three years [the board elects five members on a rotating basis every year so that at any given time there are 15 board members]. The slate, consisting of Marjorie Bullard, Christel Collier, Sue Ramser, Edna Rourke and Roger Wheeler, was unanimously approved.

Janet Riemer took the podium and spoke about three major items of interest:

First, she told us that George and Martha Vonderheigh had passed away. While the name may not be familiar to many of us, what was truly phenomenal was that they had a trust agreement. The trust company recently notified AVSA that we are beneficiaries of 5% of their estate after all expenses had been paid. This was stunning and wonderful news. While we don't know the extent of their estate, the mere fact that they, for whatever reason, endowed us with 5% of their estate was truly amazing. It made the Executive Committee think that there perhaps were others out there in AVSA-land who might be similarly inspired to insert an intent of some kind in their wills.

Second, she relayed some very important information from Dr. Gerard Hertel, who is a Forest Ecologist & Entomologist at West Chester University. Dr. Hertel is a very concerned biologist who wants to alert all African violet enthusiasts that there is a major threat to the environment from a recent surge in gold mining in areas in Tanzania where our beloved plant grows. National concern has been sparked by the “gold rush” occurring in the East Usambara Mountains beginning in April 2003 and continuing to the present. At the beginning of this year, a team of biologists was collecting data concerning the effects of this mining effort on forest habitats. The forests of the East Usambara Mountains are regarded as globally important for biodiversity conservation. The process of panning for gold has had a devastating effect on the forest because thousands of miners (12,000-20,000) have trampled over the plants – and this is where our species reside! The miner's presence has also disrupted the habitats of birds, amphibians and rare dragonflies. Even the drinking water that flows from the mountain streams to nearby villages may now contain mercury. He is urging each of us to write a

strong letter to request a halt to this gold mining activity in such a biologically sensitive area. Joyce continued by relaying the following address for us to send our letters: The Honorable President Benjamin Mkapa, United Republic of Tanzania, P.O. Box 9120, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Please copy the Tanzanian Embassy at 2139 R Street, N.W., Washington DC, 20008, as well as the American Embassy, P.O. Box 9123, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. [Please don't be put off by the postage. A one-ounce letter to Tanzania should cost about 80 cents.] Your efforts are most appreciated.

Third, Janet spoke about Vladimir Kalgin's wonderful PowerPoint presentation on the African violet boom in Russia and about the auction of his 50 Russian hybrids at the luncheon the day before. Then, she added the wonderful news that Vladimir has *donated* the computer projector that he used for his presentation to AVSA. It all began when he asked if we had one that he could use for the program. We told him we did not and that not only were they very expensive to purchase, the rental fee was also prohibitive to AVSA's budget. That's when the philanthropist in Vladimir stepped in. What a grand gift to AVSA. All of us will benefit for years to come from its use. We all thank you, Vladimir, for your generosity.

Last, at Janet's prompt, Joyce Stork relayed the wonderful story of her and Kent's visit to Hong Kong. The African Violet Association of Hong Kong invited a member of AVSA to be their guest with all expenses paid to attend the Hong Kong Flower Show. The invitation was shared with the Executive Committee, and Joyce and Kent were the lucky ones to have a free schedule during the time of their show. AVSA could not have asked for better hosts, in my opinion. After the show had been judged, Mr. Lau, the AVAHK chair (and presiding officer) asked for their opinions. There is a different scale of points in our judging process, and Joyce tactfully explained that difference by "rejudging" several plants.

During their visit, they learned that having living plants in their homes is a very important part of Hong Kong life. It is like a feng shui thing that really benefits the African violet because it has become the favored plant by many. What was really interesting was that not only adults grow plants but also elementary and secondary schools eagerly participate in growing superb specimens. The flower show itself is an annual affair and is attended by – get this – a half million. We should all be so lucky. I'd settle for 1% of that.

They visited several homes including the home of the permanent President and founder of the AV Association of Hong Kong, the honorable Mr. Leung, who is in his 90s. [I don't know whether I'd like to be *permanent* President!] He grows all of his plants in a small greenhouse on top of his apartment building.

She also described the growing room of Dr. Joseph Cheung, which was the size of an average American bathroom. It contained approximately *500 plants!* It took him 4 days to tidy the room for their visit. He has six fans constantly moving, all lights are on timers, and he uses LOTS of perlite to keep the soil light. The climate is quite humid. Joyce said she looked around and jokingly said, "Maybe more plants could fit up here" as she pointed to the ceiling. "You could see the lights go on in his brain," she said.

She ended her story by telling us about Dr. Cheung's gift. He is a prominent artist as well as an African violet grower and presented them with two framed pictures, each containing three watercolor renderings of the covers he painted for their society magazine. He requested that we hang them in the AVSA office. They were simply beautiful, and Joyce and Kent handed them to Ruth and Jenny to be taken back and hung in the Beaumont office.

Open Forum was next. This is the chance for us to ask questions of the board. Jack Wilson – once again our faithful emcee – immediately launched into the news that he had received a raise for his efforts this year. They had added another zero to his salary, making it an astounding \$000. The IRS is really going to be after you, Jack. Seriously, however, he had a point to make, and I want to reiterate it because I have heard many stories over the years about how the board or the Executive Committee gets lots of freebies. Well, here's what Jack [and me] said: "We do not get salary, we pay the same registration fee as everyone else, and we pay for all of our travel and hotel expenses to attend the Executive Committee fall meeting." He then explained about "comp rooms" which are rooms that hotels routinely give to convention hosts if they qualify by reserving meeting rooms, filling the number of hotel rooms in our contract, having x number of banquets, etc. If we do get any comp rooms, we generally give one to our staff, Ruth and Jenny, and if there is more than one, we generally give one of those rooms to an officer. There is no bill for the room issued by the hotel; HOWEVER, it has been the policy for AVSA to request that the person staying in the room reimburse what the daily cost would have been to AVSA by check. So, even though an officer is staying in a comp room, that officer is paying for it – one way or another.

He then spoke about the AVSA building in Beaumont and why AVSA decided to purchase it. AVSA had been renting space for years and it was really draining our treasury. One of our members, Edna Hamilton, challenged the board that if AVSA could raise a certain amount of money, she would match it. We made the goal, investigations on various sites around the country were made, and AVSA decided to stay in Beaumont because of other factors; namely, the ease of printing the magazine there and no moving costs would be incurred. They bought the building, and we have maintained it ever since. It was a sound investment, and any donations to the Building Fund help us defray taxes and attend to any maintenance needed.

He then announced that the show had been a success. 417 registered conventioners. No one seemed to mind the \$5 entrance fee. In fact, that feature added over \$2,000 into our treasury. And, the auction was a HUGE success, bringing in a record \$5,909. He said to stay tuned for next year because there will be more Russian hybrids, *and* Japanese chimeras!

Joyce then gave the audience a heads-up about the plants we should be growing to enter into next year's show in Cincinnati in order to make BIG BUCKS! Boy, I sure had my pencil ready for this one! Some of these awards had been targeted for this year's show, but because there were no entries in the category for the special award, the designated

award money will be rolled over to next year. So, get out your order blanks and send off to your favorite vendor for the following: Emily Savage, Irish Flirt, Vintage Wine, Frozen in Time, Arizona Heat, Dean's Rosalie, Precious Pink, Tulsa Bay, Lillian Jarrett, Louisiana Lagniappe, Cutie, Aca's Red Embers and any standard chimera. Happy and successful growing to all of you!

Time for a few more questions. Jack handed the microphone to a woman, who posed the best question of the day – “who are all of you?” When the laughter subsided, Janet rose to the occasion by apologizing for not introducing everyone at the head table, and then the Officers formally introduced themselves.

Someone asked the question about how to get their plants that they purchased back into their state. As many of you know, there are agriculture inspectors at the show to provide those traveling outside the country with inspection certificates. However, many international travelers are required to remove the soil from their plants, which they apparently have been very successful in doing without harm. The point was made, however, that inside our country, it is our job to know the regulations in our own state. The easiest way is to search the requirements on the Internet.

And the last meeting of the day ended. Time to dash upstairs, collapse, pack all my stuff and then get ready for the closing dinner. I quickly changed and then rushed over to the room of my friends Martha and Lynn. As many of us do, we all examined each other's purchases over a few glasses of wine and an exchange of leaves occurred. Once again, I have gone overboard and have way too many plants and leaves. I'll never learn! But, it's so much fun!

### **President's Reception and Closing Dinner**

Time for the President's reception prior to the dinner. This meal was a sell-out. In order to accommodate everyone, the hotel had to put three tables out in the hallway. I love this dinner because it's the end of a long and wonderful week. It's a time for all of us to breathe a sigh of relief that we made it in one piece. It's a time for us to get a bit fancy in our attire. And, it's a time to seek out folks we have missed along the way during the week. The meal was just excellent. Actually, every meal function was a savory delight. Since I don't eat meat like several others in our group, I am always fearful of what my “substitute” entrée might be. This hotel did it up right. While others at my table were carving into their prime rib, I was savoring the delicacies of a perfectly grilled piece of swordfish. Another centerpiece to die for. This was a garden of succulents. I hoped I wouldn't win it. One was enough! [Thankfully, I didn't.] A fine pianist entertained us throughout the meal.

There is not a specific program for the dinner, but three things that stand out in my mind. It's always so exciting to see how many people are here representing their state or country, and we generally all stand when ours is called. We had an excellent all-round representation. The states with the most recognition were Arizona (of course) with 73 registrants, California with 49, Texas with 35 and Florida with 32. Eighteen folks

internationally represented us from Canada, 4 from Japan, 2 from Russia and one each from England and Denmark!

Then, there was the recognition of how many years we have been attending AVSA conventions. There are several long-time members, but the two with the most longevity were Nancy Hayes attending 36 conventions and, of course, none other than Mary Boland who topped the list with 39 AVSA conventions!

Several other, well-deserved awards were given: Bill Foster was given a Distinguished Service Award. Nancy Hayes was given an Honorary Life Membership. Barbara Elkin, Joe Bruns and Iris Keating were given Continuing Service Awards. Ten one-her honorary AVSA memberships were awarded to Dr. Elmer Godeny, Mary McFarland, Dr. Robert Truax, Edna Rourke, Barbara Pershing, Pat Sutton, Pat Richards, Bill Paauwe, Floyd Lawson, and Tom Glembocki. The Hudson Memorial Award was awarded to Agatha Garrison a dedicated member of the Albuquerque AVC in New Mexico. Then, it was time for the installation of the new Board members (l. to r.) Roger Wheeler, Marjorie Bullard, Christel Collier, Sue Ramser and Edna Rourke.



Last, the Cincinnati group gave us our formal invitation. Even though our hotel will be located on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, we are invited to meet them for Cincinnati Chili in 2004. We are all psyched!

Back to the room to grab some shut-eye. Must be up by 5:00 a.m. to get the 6:00 a.m. shuttle to the airport. Groan.

### Sunday, April 18

My stuff weighs a ton. I weigh two tons. How will I get me and my stuff through Checkpoint Charlie? Where is my husband? He usually carries this stuff! HELP! I have TOO MUCH STUFF!

After repacking several bags, I finally had it all checked and made my way to the plane toting my box full of plants and that darned CACTUS GARDEN! As it took off, all the visions of the week flashed by just as the mountains surrounding lovely Tucson were disappearing in the distance. It was a wonderful week. I caught up with so many good friends and made some more. It's always that way at convention. The adrenalin just keeps going and going like the Energizer Bunny. Then – in a flash – it's all over. I thought about all the plants in the overhead bin. I had my work cut out for me when I got home. I was lamenting the fact that I didn't have very many after my cross-country

move. Now with the help of my friends and a trip to the national convention I am awash in plants! Isn't it fun! I hope to see all of you in Cincinnati.

Until next year,

Carolee

P.S. My cacti decided to ignore all my protestations and are blooming and beautiful in my Florida kitchen window! But no, I'm not joining any American Cacti Association.



(unfortunately, when I remembered to take a picture, the blooms were gone)

*My thanks to all who helped me with this piece this year – Jim Owens, Joyce Stork, Martha Spyridon, Nancy Hayes – all provided me with tidbits that escaped my haphazard notes. Hopefully, Annie Rieck will be back with me next year in Cincinnati.*

<http://www.avsa.org/BatonRougeConvRpt.pdf>