

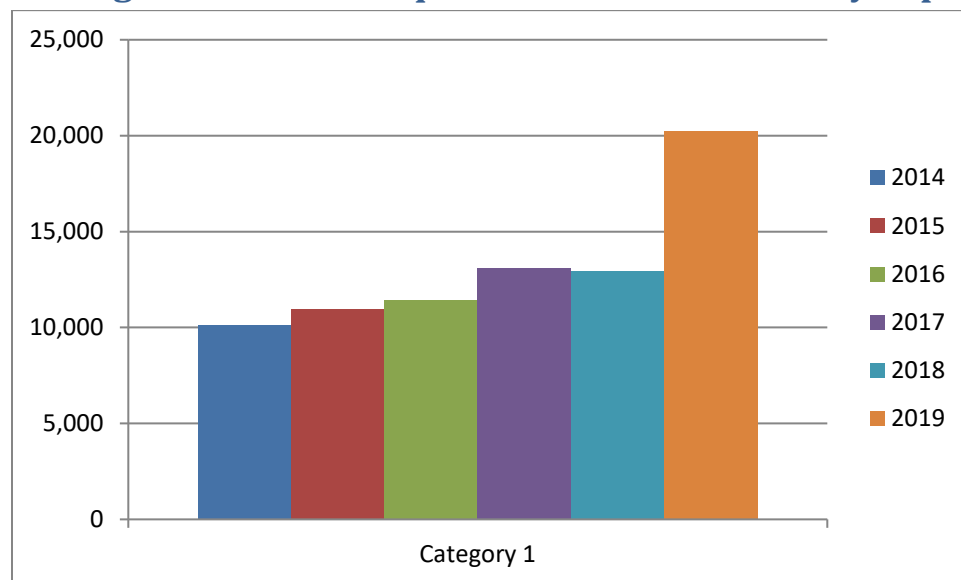
Public Relations Report January 2019

Submitted by Susan Grigg & Bob Pries co-chairs. Susan is retiring as co-chair and Doug Chyz is replacing her as co-chair.

Interest in Irises is growing:

2020 is the year of the Iris as proclaimed by National Garden Bureau (NGB) and All-America Selections. This means that many of the larger commercial nurseries will be featuring more irises in their catalogs and Irises will be a major topic of interest for Blogs, Horticulturalists, etc. during this year.

Average number of unique visitors to the Iris Encyclopedia in 1 month



2019 showed and continued interest in Irises through Google searches and others looking for Iris information. Indeed traffic on the Iris Encyclopedia has doubled from 5 years ago and expected to triple this year.

The British Iris Society reports that it has been adding many new members:

The surge in membership can be directly attributed to a renewed effort to participating in national or regional garden exhibitions.

The AIS has had very little use of its portable exhibits in the last 5 years. The 2 displays still are nice quality for small garden shows but are somewhat dated for use in large convention settings and the grander National and Regional shows. Indeed I am not aware of local clubs

who have been able to participate as exhibitors in these shows. If we are truly interested in increasing membership these large early Spring Flower shows offer great potential but only if they are done well. It is likely too late to sign up for any of the large Spring shows but probably timely for this to happen for 2021. If we wish to consider this I would suggest that a more modern larger display unit be purchased.

Does the board wish to invest in an improved Display and create a committee for carrying out one or more Displays?

My recommendation would be to pursue this but only if we could get an adequate number of individuals to commit to manning such booths. Note entries for such flower shows usually require submission a year in advance. Usual fees could be as much as \$500. The cost of a new better display would likely be \$1,500-\$2,000. Local clubs used to participate in the Philadelphia Flower Show, The St. Louis Flower Show, etc. But I believe it will take a bit of inspiration and financial commitment from AIS to accomplish this today.

Current Display Units:

The traveling iris exhibit screen should be in use at shows and sales to attract people and show the great variety of the iris. Every RVP and affiliate should be aware of this marketing tool. Where is a description of it on the AIS website? Is the exhibit still in good shape and available? Should AIS encourage the purchase of an exhibit screen for each region to make this tool more useful?

Volunteers need to be secured to promote AIS and the iris at local home and garden shows. Often these events are left to commercial home builders and building trades. If there is any chance to use an exhibit at one of these events, it would be a way to reach many prospective home owners who will need plants to make a home landscape attractive. Potted irises could be displayed in bloom, if the season is right, or potted irises could be sold, provided the venue would allow it. One affiliate in North Carolina had a table at the State Fair in October with a clump of 'Harvest of Memories' in full bloom in a basket. A volunteer handed out iris culture information and answered questions.

Action Item: That AIS RVP Counselor discuss and encourage all RVPs to have in their regions at least one iris exhibit screen for use at regional sales and shows.

Voucher Program

The voucher program continues to attract some new members, especially at sales or shows if it is publicized by the hosting club. More nurseries need to be contacted to join the program to help make it successful. Each RVP and each club president should be sure that all prospective and all current members of their region and club understand how the vouchers work. The explanation is on the website, but clearly not everyone knows about vouchers.

Action Item: That the Voucher Program should be handled by the Membership Committee.

Membership Contest

The Membership Contest has been largely overlooked as a tool for encouraging AIS members to work to attract new members. There needs to be an attractive mechanism to remind current members to always work on inviting new gardeners to join AIS. The Membership Committee seems a logical place to conduct this program. Social media and new ideas are needed to make this contest worthwhile.

Action Item: That the Membership Contest should be handled by the Membership Committee.