

Public Relations Spring 2020 Report

At a very high risk for death from corona virus I have decided that I need to make my assessment of AIS PR before I will no longer be able to do so. Governor Cuomo has pointed out that in times of severe disruption it is possible to move people to rethink many of the problems they have been trying to ignore or have been unable to find the courage to change. These trying times provide an opportunity to recreate our organization in a way that is more effective and productive. We should not try to return to normal but move forward with the lessons we learn to make the future an even better time than the past

Reason for being

I would like to present the following principles that make AIS not merely a social club but a valued member of the horticultural community.

1. That AIS offers to the gardening world the most comprehensive resources of information on the Genus Iris and related iridaceae.
2. That the AIS serves to provide timely updates on this information.
3. That AIS develops new information through research and the recording of observations and registration of irises in commerce.

After many years of talking with members of AIS, I can not remember anyone that did not mention information as a primary reason they chose to belong. This means that today with the development of the internet we must compete to be a valued resource. If we cannot be the most comprehensive, most accurate, most timely, and most newsworthy resource we will disintegrate to merely a social club.

I do not wish to denigrate social clubs. I love commiserating with Irisarians about our losses and successes but perhaps Facebook can do that better than AIS. I fear our primary purpose of service to the world horticultural community is under threat.

What should the future look like?

Some ten years ago or more when Roy Epperson was president, I warned him privately that Dave's Garden was becoming the go-to-resource for Iris Information. I convinced him of the value and potential of an Iris wiki. After all, why have an Iris society if it can not work together on a collaboration platform for creating a comprehensive data base? Through the years hundreds of irisarians became a valuable part of the society by being able to add information and pictures to the wiki. The quality of the information is better than any of our printed resources because it is constantly peer reviewed and we can change an error immediately not waiting for the next R&I to correct the previous errors.

Iris identification:

People have always wanted The perhaps irrational goal to create a resource that could provide identification of an unknown Iris. We always say it can only serve to validate and existing name, but we all know that what people want is identification.

Dave's Garden, in its most current iteration (The National Gardening Association) now claims to allow identification of Iris cultivars for subscribers. They use a series of parameters that are quite arbitrary and of course they have only a fraction of the data that is in the Encyclopedia.

But The NGA, like the Iris Encyclopedia, is still using now antique tools. Although impractical and certainly unaffordable at this time, analysis of the genetic code could identify cultivars. This sounds pie in the sky, but the technology is there .

Another possibility is the use of artificial intelligence. If AI can find an individual in a stadium of 50,000 people by facial recognition, it could certainly be used to identify an iris after a period of training. It is hoped on my part that the Iris Encyclopedia with its enormous volume of images could be a valuable component in an Artificial Intelligence Iris program of the future.

This may sound 'pie in the sky' but the technology is already there, and we should not be surprised if someone is already working on this. My only hope is that it occurs within the Iris Society and AIS does not lose its relevance.

More immediate challenges:

Years ago people would turn to AIS to learn about what's new in Iris. The Registration & Introductions were printed in January or early February and it was exciting to learn of the new irises that had been registered for the previous year. Today as news items the R&Is are redundant. The new catalogs are generally out with colored images in Early January. The 2019 irises are often all over the internet many months before the R&I is printed. AIS's official announcement of 'What's New' is no longer news. Except as an official archive, registration is no longer a valued resource.

We cannot and should not try to hold back the catalogs, websites and Facebook posts . But in many ways they make the AIS irrelevant. How could we restore relevance to AIS? Presently hybridizers reserve names sometimes years ahead of introduction. By having an approved name they can list new introductions in their catalogs whether or not the registrar gets around to approving the registrations 6-18 months later after the approval is needed, they can still print their catalogs.

If registrations were approved within a week of receipt there could be monthly displays of newly registered irises on the website and/or the wiki. AIS would have news again. If the Images and registrations were gathered together in January and printed as an illustrated R&I, It would become a super catalog that would be highly desirable, not the relic it currently is. I would project that this could be accomplished as a Bulletin size magazine and probably at close to the same cost as the present bulletin and sold for \$15.

We can't do it;

Obviously Registration has not been working this well for several years. Perhaps now is the time to rethink the structure. When AIS first started registration there were two jobs Registrar and Recorder. Charles Gersdorf was registrar and accepted names and descriptions, Ethel Ansom Peckham was recorder and collected the names and assembled them into lists adding introduction information. Perhaps it is time to split the Registrars office into several tasks. Instead of a household being registrar, perhaps we should have a committee. I could imagine one person approving names, another crafting descriptions, another validating introductions, another collecting images, and another who would assemble the files for printing. The easiest response to this is No. But if we really want to make AIS relevant again we need to find a way to make registrations timely .

The one piece of news that AIS could always provide before other sources is new registrations but they must be produced in a timely way. We live in a world that wants news immediately not history.