

The_President's_Report

Kansas City, Missouri -- 11/2006

Many things that effect and impact AIS committees go through the President's office either before or during the committee's work on a project. The reports of committees and committee chairmen will reflect these various activities. Rather than point out or comment on these events in advance, I prefer to add comments - if appropriate - at the time of and within the context of that committee's or chairman's report.

A botanical garden named Swan Lake Iris Garden in Sumter, South Carolina was brought to my attention. Because connecting with and working with botanical gardens falls under no specific committee, I will give a general report on what followed.

In August I received a note from Elke Longsworth, whom many of you will remember was co-chairman of the Memphis Convention in 2002. Two brochures for the Swan Lake Iris Garden were included. The note told of a visit Elke and her husband had made in May to this Sumter, SC public garden "growing a lot of Japanese irises around a lake." Elke added that those working at the garden to whom she spoke "had (n)ever heard of the American Iris Society". She suggested that this garden/these folks "might be a new source/group to get involved" with AIS.

From the brochures I learned that this garden conducts an annual Japanese Iris Festival. It promotes itself as being South Carolina's oldest continuous festival, and as being ranked among the top festivals in the Southeast. It did seem that AIS should make an effort to be involved.

I contacted Region 5 RVP Caroline Hawkins, SJI President Jill Copland, and Bob Pries, AIS Chairman of Marketing and Public Relations. From there the contacts spread out to Clarence Mahan, John Coble, Roy Epperson and Dennis Hager.

Through these folks important information was added which revealed that in the past the AIS has had a relationship with this garden. In recent times, however, the relationship has lapsed between the Garden and various divisions within the AIS.

As a result of this attention and exchange of information, those contacted generally agree that more should and will be done to make the AIS a viable and continuing presence at Swan Lake Iris Gardens.

The Swan Lake Iris Garden experience highlights an area to which the AIS needs to award a higher priority - the value of being involved **whenever possible** with public or botanical gardens in a visible manner. Having worked as a volunteer at Descanso Gardens, an outstanding botanic garden in Southern California, I understand the difficulties inherent in working with botanic gardens, but I also know that the rewards for the AIS as well as for the botanic garden are worth the struggle.

Jeanne Clay Plank, AIS President