

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING REPORT - FALL 2015

State of the Encyclopedia

Programming Code Changes

As usual we have had a very busy year. I would like to call attention first to a huge triumph that almost nobody knows about. As you remember there were complaints about accent marks not being used on cultivar names in certain sections of an entry. This was because TWIKI was written in ASCII. The current universal standard is now Unicode. Today's Unicode works in, I believe, hundreds of foreign languages and scripts. An expert on Unicode advised us it was the way to go, but a conversion in such a huge database could be risky. Thanks to Tim Valenzuela the conversion occurred and nobody knew because we did not get the thousands of errors that could have occurred. Now the TWiki should handle all sorts of foreign scripts, I think even including Japanese and Chinese. In a related area I also found a Russian linguist teaching at a US university who has been translating some of the Cyrillic cultivar names so we English speakers can appreciate what the hybridizer was saying in his language. I do not know if I am unusual but for me attaching some meaning to foreign words makes them less obscure.

Publishing the Annual Awards

I wish to thank Gerry Snyder for the huge task of completing the Awards. By getting the results to me a few days before they were released and while Jim was notifying the winners, I was able to get the image gallery together for the day of release. Finally, we beat Facebook to the punch and our members were notified FIRST by way of News & Notes. This was a grueling 3 days of work but we did get all the major awards up, leaving the Honorable Mentions until the next week. I am still finishing some links. This is the most popular issue of News & Notes, and together with the data from N&N and the wiki I can say about 1800 people looked at the awards and about 150 downloaded the list to take to their local club or show friends.

Hybridizer Lists

The wiki also has made major progress on the Hybridizer lists due to Betsy Higgins and John Black, who have now put up pages for each of over 2,500 hybridizers. We do not know yet how many hybridizers are still missing, but Betsy and John continue to search the wiki for those missing. This is a huge task because in many cases, like Brown and Johnson, etc. there are several with the same last names. Because the Iris Register may have only an initial, or just the last name or a nickname for the same person they have to double check the printed checklists and R & Is and other literature. They have found several with the wrong initial or name in the Register, but with their diligence we are getting this improved in the Encyclopedia with a full name, not just an initial or a last name.

The Online Library

The development of the online Library continues. It gives me goose bumps reading John Wister's vision for an Iris Library and the fact that we are finally reaching his goals almost 100 years later. A couple of years ago when I started the online catalog project I had about eighty catalogs in the Library. John Jones was able to get a grant from the AIS Foundation to pay for scanning catalogs and those added about another 250. Meanwhile, the Biodiversity Heritage Library added more catalogs online and I added another 250. In the meantime I purchased Adobe Acrobat DC for \$292 a year, so I can now scan catalogs myself. It is another tedious process and a 60 page catalog may take me two hours to scan, but I will be able to add hundreds of catalogs in the future. Presently there are around 600 catalogs in the Library, but this could easily reach a couple of thousand by next year.

Compared to other areas of the Encyclopedia, the Library is still a resource that is rarely used, probably less than 5,000 views a month. But I consider this a very important task so that Iris History is stored in an easily accessible format. Presently, catalogs and articles are arranged by year, author, nursery, and topic. When the Library is complete, one should be able to browse a year or decade, or go to the nursery list and find all the catalogs a given nursery produced. Ultimately one will be able to type in a cultivar name and find each journal article or catalog in which it is described, and there will be a link from the cultivar's page to the catalog of record for introduction.

The catalogs and literature have already proved their usefulness; since descriptions are quoted on historic cultivar's pages, even if an image is not available an iris can be verified by reading multiple descriptions. Thanks to David Potemski and Mike Unser for adding many of these quotes.

Update on Iris Images

Of course most people come to the Encyclopedia for images. Terry Laurin, our photo manager, has incredibly increased the image total this year by 20,000. While Terry deserves much of the credit, Kate Brewitt was an enormous help, and also Janet Smith. Of course we must thank all the photographers who created these images.

Conclusion

The Encyclopedia is a playground for all creative irisarians. I invite anyone to develop a topic area and there are several ways in which they can be credited for that effort. I have several topic areas under development that will not be evident for a while, but I am willing to help anyone add their contributions to the wiki. There should be lots of new areas of interest each year.

In summation I would like to point out how the Encyclopedia is doing overall. It continues to see about a 30% growth in usage every year and as yet has shown no sign of slowing. The current high for users was in the month of May with 16,800 unique visitors. This year only a couple of months saw less than 10,000 users. Using all sorts of inputs my estimate is that the ultimate audience for the Encyclopedia may be between 20,000 to 25,000 irisarians. It is hard to discern the wiki's impact on AIS. Almost every page near the bottom asks people to join with an e-membership to support the Encyclopedia. Probably most people never notice this, but I have had e-mails from a few that said that's why they took out an e-membership. One benefit to AIS that is hard to measure is the goodwill it creates for the society. For years I had heard complaints from members about AIS. They did not see that the organization was serving them. If this year's Convention is any measure, this seems to have changed somewhat. I had innumerable people come up to me and say the wiki is the best thing AIS has ever done. They may not be happy with everything we do, but at least for some we are doing something right.

In relation to other plant societies the wiki compares well. But I must note that the daylily website was in the top 100,000 websites in July while we were only in the top 200,000 websites. Several years back I remember being happy to be in the top 500,000 websites and at that time AIS was already doing better than AHS according to the month. When it comes to a Google search for Iris, AIS usually comes up before Dave's Garden or All Things Plants. Still our present society expects more from us. I got an e-mail from someone extolling the Hosta Society Website and complaining that the Encyclopedia did not provide a list of reblooming irises that would bloom in the shade as companion plants to his August Hosta Lilies.

Encyclopedia Use Statistics

Unique Users	
Month of August '15	13,567
From September '14 through Sept. '15	134,742
Average Visit Length: August 2015: Approximately 8 minutes	
Pages Viewed	
Month of August '15	364,021
From September '14 through Sept. '15	3,841,871
Hits (Files Viewed)	
Month of August '15	2,042,308
From September '14 through Sept. '15	18,408,990
Encyclopedia development between January 1 and August 30	
Topic Updates	76,823
Encyclopedia Pages	71,284

Voucher Program

The Voucher Program is still an additional tool for marketing The American Iris Society. Sadly, there are still many affiliates that are not taking advantage of this tool for recruitment. Each RVP has been sent a reminder to be sure each affiliate in their Region knows about the Voucher Program, and a link to the explanation of the program on the AIS website will be in *News and Notes* periodically.

Since the Membership Secretary's report in spring 2015, 336 vouchers have been sent out to new and upgrading members of AIS; 626 vouchers have been sent since the report last fall. Since the program began 1,769 new or upgraded members have received vouchers. Most of the voucher nurseries have reported they have received a good response from the program so far. Each nursery listed may use the phrase, "AIS Voucher Nursery", in any printed material or ads they produce. This will serve to identify them as a cooperating part of the Voucher Program.

Membership Contest

There were two winners of the 2015 Membership Contest; the affiliate winner was the Bluegrass Iris Society of Kentucky in Region 7, and the individual winner was Pat McNeal of the Bay Shore Iris Society of Maryland in Region 4. The announcement was made at the Awards Banquet at the Spring Convention in Portland, Oregon; a prize of \$100.00 was mailed to the affiliate and \$150.00 was mailed to the individual winner.

The Contest needs to continue to be promoted in *IRISES*, in *News and Notes*, and by each Region. New members are the life blood of the AIS. Without them, we will continue to decline.

News & Notes

2015 Highlights - As expected, the most popular edition was the Special Edition announcing the AIS Medal Awards. It was both the most read and had the most followed link. Working with the Electronic Services and the Iris Encyclopedia, it provides a rapid means of announcing the results and directing members to where they can read about and see the winners. Previewing the Dykes Medal and other Medal iris candidates was the topic most followed from our

monthly issues. This was followed up with a World of Irises post, “What Surprises Will You Find in *News & Notes*?” and a working version of that issue of *News & Notes* on the Iris Encyclopedia for everyone to use for publicity for their Club and AIS. In addition to items about irises and irisarians, many of the topics are time sensitive notices and reminders. Because over 20% of the emails are opened within a few hours or overnight, this is a good method to encourage a rapid response.

Statistics - Our statistics continue to be 2-3 times what Constant Contact reports for non-profits. We have a 56% average for opens compared to an industry average of 25%. Our click-through rate is 32% and the industry average is 11.7%. Just recently Constant Contact, our newsletter service, began providing information on the devices the email is opened with: computers vs mobile devices (cellphones, tablets, etc.). In April, the first issue for which this information is available, it was 95:5. By July it was 77:23. And the October issue is currently 68:32; almost one-third of the devices are mobile!

We Need Your Feedback - Both from the Board Members and from all AIS Members.

1. Are you reading your *News & Notes* on a computer or a mobile device? How is it working for you? Comments on appearance, ease of use, comparisons, everything else please. Right now we are just learning about the options available to accommodate both computers and mobile devices at the same time and need some guidance.
2. What topics do you like? What don't you like? What topics are we missing? Both particular items we should include and general topics that could be covered can help us make *News and Notes* more useful to you and all members.
3. How can we help you? Whether it is your Club, Committee, Region, Section, or fill-in-the-blank, what would be useful? Both in *News & Notes* and more broadly for the Marketing and PR Committee, what can we help you accomplish?

Additional Services - Not strictly *News & Notes*; however, here are some things to keep in mind when thinking about how we might help. *News & Notes* items are mostly short notes and links

that point to more information. If you have a form or notice and it is not on the Internet yet, we may be able to help. We can put up notices (usually PDFs) so that both you and/or *News & Notes* can point to them. This could be useful if you don't have a website but do have a newsletter. This can be particularly useful for photo galleries such as Popularity Polls or Medal Winners. Let us know what you would like to have and we may be able to provide guidance or help set it up.

ACTION ITEMS:

The PR and Marketing Committee requests that the AIS Board discuss the following items:

- Webinars
- Overseas Outreach
- Bulletin Board
- Publications
- Purpose