



It's unbelievable, but our conferences just keep getting bigger and better! This is a special edition of the APGA Quarterly to wrap up the 6th Annual Alaska Peony Growers Conference before it all recedes into our distant past as we rush forward into our busy future! If you were able to attend, you will enjoy reading about some of the highlights of the event, but if you couldn't attend, we're hoping you are inspired to attend the next one! |||

~The Editors

Record Breaking Attendance!



A snowy night in Girdwood.

The record conference attendance was matched with record snows in Girdwood. If you like to ski, this was the time to be at Alyeska! And if you like peonies, this was the event to attend.

The conference brought almost half (49%) of APGA's membership to Girdwood for an agenda packed with business and marketing related topics. Represented among the 130 attendees were 22 different Alaskan communities from the Interior to Southeast. Forty-five farm names showed up on registration forms with PEONY in half of them.

Juneau's Haa Aani, a Native institution focusing on the economic and cultural identity of Sealaska Corporation shareholders, attended both the Alaska Peony Growers Conference and the Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference.

For the second time in a row the conference attracted growers from outside the state. A family from New Richmond, Wisconsin and the owners of Boreal Peonies in Liberty, Indiana joined Alaska peony farmers at the Alyeska resort. Three state legislators were hoping to come, but the heavy snows in Juneau prevented their departure. APGA President Ron Illingworth invited David Guttenberg (Fairbanks), Eric Feige (Chickaloon), House Resources Committee Co-chair, and Paul Seaton (Homer), House Resources Committee Co-chair, to the conference after they expressed their interest in Alaska's peony industry. It's disappointing that our representatives weren't able to attend because we want them to experience the energy of our new industry and support the personal investments the peony growers have put into their new own farms as well as APGA.

2012 ATTENDANCE BY REGION

- 31% Anchorage / Eagle River / Girdwood
- 27% Mat-Su
- 28% Kenai Peninsula
- 14% Interior

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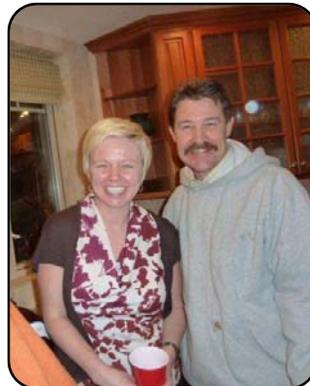


THE TANNER CIRCLE RECEPTION

APGA hosted a reception on Thursday night that far exceeded anyone's expectation for attendance. At one point someone counted 63 people at the Tanner Circle House. "Pigs" of beer from the Soldotna River City Brewery and wine from Homer's Bear Creek Winery were a hit as were all the other munchies APGA served up. Socializing was interrupted for a short time as APGA held their annual general membership meeting, but President Ron kept the meeting on point and festivities were resumed with gusto. All in all, it was a good opportunity to mingle and meet other members.



The Tanner Circle reception was a lot of fun.



Amy & Richard appear to be having a good time.



The "pigs" got a lot of attention!



APGA's general membership meeting.



President Ron sums up the year



Irene cleans, Beth & Kurt chat!

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

Hopefully, everyone who attended the conference came away with something useful, whether it was a price list for peony roots, a new marketing or production idea, dreams of a Kobota tractor, or a new friend. 'Having an opportunity to network' usually gets high marks when conference goers are asked 'What did you like best?'. It's hard to put a finger on the conference's most >>>



significant outcome, but Sue Kent, Midnight Sun Peonies, and I both decided independently that one of the important things that happened was people started thinking and talking about cooperatives again. The last time that the cooperative business model made the agenda was in 2008. Sue sent an email saying, "One of the greatest outcomes of the conference is the recognition that we need to *at least* look seriously at selling cooperatively. We may or may not go that way, but until we know what it would take to make that happen, it's hard to decide one way or the other. Both Ko and Diane reiterated the advantages of selling cooperatively, and I think a lot of the attendees started to consider the advantages. But the concept has raised a lot of questions that many of us are now resolved to find the answers to."



At previous conferences, there has been discussion of the small operator who would grow and sell to a packhouse. I was flabbergasted when 3/4 of the hands in the room went up after someone asked, "How many of you plan to have your own packhouse?" I wondered if people were equating packhouse to cooler/chiller. But maybe not, and a very high percentage of growers are, at this point, planning to sell, pack, and ship the flowers they grow. One member reported losing her investor's backing as a result of the conference. We'd love to know why the investor backed out.

MAT-SU SHOWS UP!

One of the most surprising findings from the conference was how many people are growing peonies in the Mat-Su area. Denise Bowlan gave an update on the Mat-Su growers and we're sure everyone was surprised not only at the number of Mat-Su growers but how far along they are in developing as their own region. Denise had statistics that she gathered over about a three-week time period, but she felt that it was all obsolete the minute she got there. It's exciting!

SURVEYS

Thanks to Amy Pettit, Division of Agriculture, and Jeff Smeenck, UAF Cooperative Extension Service, for conducting an impromptu survey of conference participants. The results of the survey offered a lot of excellent suggestions for upcoming conferences. The list of topics for future presentations includes everything -- production techniques, business, marketing, harvesting, packing, and shipping. Eight people voted for marketing strategies, 5 said they wanted to hear more talks from existing farmers, and 4 included field preparation and maintenance for beginning growers. Four people said they missed Pat Holloway's presence and data. The roundtable sessions were well received. Five people asked for more or longer roundtables and it was suggested that future conferences include breakout time for regions. >>>



NEW GROWERS

An amazing number of new growers surfaced at the 2012 winter conference. Although the question was not asked, “Are you a new peony grower”, 46% of the 130 conference attendees said this conference was their first.



The New Grower's School had a small room but big attendance.

The interest in the pre-conference New Grower School was phenomenal. Registration filled to capacity at 40 just a few weeks after registration opened. By the time the conference started, Jan Hanscom, Polar Peonies, and Marji Illingworth, North Pole Peonies, already had an additional 30 people signed up for a repeat class in Fairbanks. By the time the conference ended, the repeat class was full. This is impressive given that only 16 people from the Interior were present in Girdwood. Afterwards an additional two classes were added to meet demand, and new grower workshops in other parts of the state are being scheduled (see another

article below for dates of additional planned classes and meetings).

FUTURE PEONY CONFERENCE DATES AND LOCATIONS

Four of the last six winter Alaska Peony Growers Conferences have been scheduled back to back with the Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference in an effort to make it easy for growers to attend both conferences. This year 32 people attended both events, 46% of Greenhouse & Nursery Conference attendees and 25% of Peony Conference participants. Of those responding to the Alaska Peony Growers Conference evaluation question, ‘Should the peony conference follow greenhouse & nursery?’, 55% said yes and 23% said they didn't care. This is a pretty strong indication that back-to-back conferences are useful.



Record attendance at the 2012 winter conference.

The Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference has been rotating between Fairbanks, Anchorage, Mat-Su, and Girdwood. Girdwood was thought to be the most convenient conference location for growers on the Kenai Peninsula, but it appears this isn't true during the winter. A number of people from Homer and Soldotna flew



to Anchorage and then made the drive south. One person suggested that the statewide rotation for the Alaska

Greenhouse & Nursery Conference include only Fairbanks and Anchorage. Would APGA members support this change?

At this point, the location of the 2013 winter conference is uncertain. It's been a while since the winter conference was in Fairbanks. Three people wrote on their evaluations that they'd like the peony conference to be two days instead of a day and a half. Two people prefer it not be held in January. Given these responses came from an open-ended question, the percentage of people writing down the same thoughts is small.

RESPONSES TO "Where should the 2013 Winter Conference be held?"	
Anchorage	47%
Girdwood	17%
Mat-Su	11%
Kenai Peninsula	10%
Fairbanks	10%
Hawaii	1%
Don't care	3%

~Julie Riley, CES February 26, 2012

Ko Writes. . .

Thank you for inviting me to the APGA Winter Conference in Girdwood this last January. What a dynamic team of current & future Alaska peony growers were gathered in this Assembly. I hope the information shared and educational tracks exceeded your expectations and were worth every penny invested to your attendance.

Oregon Perennial Company is much appreciative of the peony business received from the APGA members. We are looking forward to a great plant growing season and a prosperous harvest this fall 2012. It is our pleasure to provide you with the best peony roots available 'From the Grower to the Grower'TM.



Andre Piet Ko

Warm Regards, Team OPC, Andre, Piet, & Ko >>>



**2012 Summer
Conference Dates
are Set**

Mark your calendars. Get ready for a very special summer conference! The Mat-Su growers are hosting it, and the dates are August 9 to 11. Details will be made available as the event gets organized.

**New Grower
Information**

INTERIOR

Ron and Marji are offering Planting Clinics at LilyVale Farm (North Pole):

May 20 from 3:30 - 5:30

May 22 from 7 - 9 pm

As well as Picking Demonstrations

July 9th 1 - 2:30 pm

July 10th 7 - 8:30 pm.

Please contact Marji at marji@northpolepeonies.com for reservations.

SOUTH CENTRAL

The Mat-Su growers are planning New Grower School classes in August during the summer conference.

KENAI PENINSULA

Shelley Rainwater is hosting a meeting for Kenai Peninsula associates and growers on March 10 at the Best Western Bidarka in Homer, Saturday March 10th at 1:00pm.

**This is your
last
newsletter. . .**

. . . if you haven't renewed your 2012 APGA membership. After this month, the Quarterly Newsletter will be emailed only to current members although non-members can read it on the APGA web site.

