



# Alaska Peony Growers Association Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2016

## Presidents Message to APGA Current and Former Members

APGA Members,

3/3/16

The Alaska Peony Growers Association harnesses the tremendous talent and potential of our members to accomplish collectively what we cannot do as individuals. The greatest assets of this organization are the skills and experience of our membership.

In 2015 the APGA Board of Directors made an effort to clearly communicate APGA's Internal Revenue Code 501-C-6 non-profit status to our membership. APGA experienced dynamic growth that required careful review and revision to the definitions of our membership levels in 2015. APGA's Board focused on ways to include all lines of business within the Association. This resulted in three tiers of membership: Commercial Grower, Associate, and Supporting membership. The membership reviewed and passed the new membership structure by unanimous vote at the Winter Conference. The three tiers of membership are now written into the by-laws.

The Board conducted discussions on membership fees taking into consideration the comments from membership.

1. Some Commercial Growers felt the annual \$200.00 membership fee was a hardship.
2. Associates overwhelmingly did not want to lose access to the "Members Only" website resources and offered to pay extra to access information.
3. Supporting Members commented that \$25.00 in annual dues was an absolute bargain.

Taking all of the above into consideration, the Board voted to change the annual dues for each tier of membership to \$100.00. The 2015/2016 actions of the Board are sound decisions based on well defined organizational principles. A clear understanding of these principles by all members positions APGA to prioritize outward goals. It is now our objective to go outside the Association and bring home results. Lofty goals however, are only as good as implementation. Our success depends on engaged members that translate ideas into action.

Key to our efficient operation as an Association is communication and awareness of networking tools within the Association. Know who represents your region on the Board of Directors. One seat is vacant for the Homer Region. Know your Regional Representative. A Regional Representative seat is open in Homer. A seat is open on the Membership Committee.

Volunteer for a committee. Committee members are on the front lines of serving our membership and growing our BRAND, "Alaska Peonies". At this time we have committees that are understaffed.

A new concept that I would like to pursue would be a "Communications Committee" that would include Newsletter, Facebook, and Website to combine talents and ideas to energize and invigorate communications within and outside of APGA.

Also know that a steady supply of volunteers is required to "row the boat". Board members "term out". Seats for the Board, Regional Representatives, and Committee positions are open on a rotating basis. Know how your Association operates and participate.

We have a lot of UN-tapped potential that we are asking to step up and get involved.

To Volunteer. Contact me directly at: RSRepper@gmail.com or contact APGA's Executive Administrator at: wells1@alaska.net .

Wishing you all a prosperous 2016;

Richard Repper  
APGA President

*(This message went out to the membership as an e-mail with attached documents to give more information on committees, representatives and the Association. If you missed that e-mail and would like to get the attachments, contact Richard.)*

Opening day



## 2016 APGA Winter Conference – Homer, Alaska

Above: One of many co-op booths. To Right: Gayle from Chrysal, Piet Wierstra, Andre Wierstra. Below: One of the many classes.



\*Season Extension with High Tunnels (BF 220) Know Before You Grow\* - an online course through the Northeast Beginning Farmer Project Tues. March 22 - April 19, 2016, with webinars every Tuesday evening from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

High tunnels can be a valuable tool for your farm to add value to vegetable production! In this six-week online course through the Northeast Beginning Farmer Project, regional vegetable specialists Jud Reid and Crystal Stewart will teach you to expand your growing season and improve the quality of your horticultural crops using high tunnels.

Adding weeks to either end of your growing season can mean attaining a premium for having products available well before (or long after) other local growers. But the structures that make this possible-unheated plastic-covered "high tunnels" or "hoop houses"-can cost a lot of money, and they bring special management considerations that need to be understood in order to be profitable additions to your farm.

This course is meant for farmers who already have some experience successfully growing vegetables outdoors and are exploring high tunnels as a way to expand the season or improve plant quality. Information will be focused on using high tunnels in colder climates (US Climate Zones 4-6), but can be adapted to other growing regions.

By the end of this course growers will have the knowledge to do the following:

- Complete a basic site assessment and know when to bring in experts to discuss site limitations
- Make decisions to improve or maintain their soil health and fertility in the tunnel
- Select an appropriate high tunnel structure for their site, climate, and production needs
- Select and grow appropriate cold and/or warm season crops for the tunnel
- Employ pest control and trouble-shooting strategies for high tunnels
- Decide if high tunnels make economic, environmental, and social sense on the farm

Instructors:

Jud Reid is a regional vegetable specialist with the CCE Cornell Vegetable Program.

Crystal Stewart is a regional vegetable specialist with the CCE Eastern New York Commercial Horticulture Program.

#### MORE INFO AND REGISTRATION:

<http://www.nebeginningfarmers.org/online-courses/all-courses/season-extension-with-high-tunnels-bf-220/>

Have questions? Contact:

Erica Frenay, Online Course Coordinator at 607-255-9911 orejf5@cornell.edu

OR Steve Gabriel, Online Course Support at sfg53@cornell.edu

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AK-SARE-L mailing list

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*APGA Board Members who attended the 2016 Foraker Training: Gary Lincoln, Patti Floyd, Richard Repper, Wanda Haken, Ron Illingworth*

# 2015 APGA Accomplishments

by Richard Repper

As President, I am constantly impressed by the talent, collaboration, and energy of our leadership team. From APGA's humble beginnings, Irene and I have served on the Board of Directors on a continuous basis. APGA's Articles of Incorporation were drafted on our kitchen table and signed by Irene 8/13/09. I will "term-out" this year. I have observed that the success of new board members is greatly enhanced by good planning on the part of outgoing board members. Establishing a strategic plan, with long term goals is key to reaching our objectives. A good game plan understood, agreed to and implemented leaves a "smooth wake" of uninterrupted order for the succession of new talent coming in.

Foraker trains non-profit board of directors on; Strategic planning, Management strategy, Team building, Communication, Planned growth, Mission, & Structure. Our organization is state-wide. Business is handled by teleconference, e-mail, and regional meetings. Once a year we convene for the winter conference. At our last conference I gave the kick-off speech and addressed "2015, year in review". I have received multiple requests to once again communicate our 2015 accomplishments. Board training at Foraker sessions has contributed greatly to effective results.

2015 accomplishments include;

1. APGA was represented and promoted at;
  - Wholesale Florist & floral Supply Conference - Miami
  - Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers Conference - Delaware
  - Floral Profit Blast - Seattle
2. Rita Jo Shoultz traveled to Singapore to meet with wholesalers & promote Alaska Peonies.
3. Met with the FED-EX Alaska manager and negotiated a 50% discount for APGA members on overnight air shipments leaving Alaska.
4. Three year fertility grant completed under budget. MingChu acquired new weather station for future research.
5. Board voted to continue producing the APGA Calendar.
6. Set up APGA website ad space.
7. Set up "website news" to communicate board activities to membership. - Click; membership, news, & board minutes
8. APGA website has new Community Message Page.
9. Scheduled Foraker strategic planning for March 3.
10. Board member Jon Spiegel attended Valley "Special land use district" meetings to stop restrictive zoning.
11. Richard Repper and Alaska Farm Bureau director Amy Seitz attended Central Peninsula zoning and land restriction meetings to speak and advocate ag use.
12. Implemented new policy / procedure for APGA funding requests.
13. On-going communication with WUSATA to pursue trade contacts in Asia.
14. APGA Facebook account launched.
15. Monitored Google analytics. Tracked website hits worldwide.
16. Approved Pat Holloway's annual statewide growers' survey.
17. Applied for three year "Specialty Crop Competitive Grant" Grant approved for \$40,000.00. Gary & Andrea will collect

field samples, commute, & operate from Washington State University.

18. Held summer farm tours statewide. Thank you Regional Reps!
19. Hired new accountant. - Eileen -
20. David Guttenburg, Kevin Meyer, and Mike Chenault signed legislation in Juneau to proclaim July as Alaska Peony Month.
21. Conflict of Interest Policy signed and adhered to by Board of Directors.
22. Continued co-op development with Andrew Crow.
23. APGA continued to contribute a column in the "American Peony Society" newsletter.
24. Alaska Peonies received coverage in; "Florist Review", "Flowers And", "Alaska Magazine", Fox News, and area newspapers statewide.
25. Regional Rep roles and responsibilities were updated to promote communication and participation within the association.
26. APGA Reps flew to Washington D.C. to meet with legislators to promote Alaska Peonies and American Grown Brands.
27. Membership brochures were printed to communicate new changes to policy. - Three tiers of membership.
28. Produced and distributed APGA Newsletter. Thanks Jan!
29. Homer Conference committee hosted a fantastic winter conference.
30. General membership meeting at the conference voted unanimously to accept proposed membership by-law revisions following a 14 day comment period.
31. Meetings with Anchorage Economic Development Office & Lynden Overseas Logistics to discuss cold chain freight requirements out of Ted Stevens International Airport.

As mentioned earlier, I am continuously impressed by the talent, collaboration, and energy of APGA's high performance Board. Give 'em a pat on the back when you see them!

## 2015 Board of Directors;

President; Richard Repper – Soldotna

Vice President; Patty Floyd – Nikiski

Past President; Harry Davidson – Mat-Su Valley

Past President; Ron Illingworth – North Pole / APGA Growers' Cup Recipient

Secretary; Wanda Haken – Nenana

Treasurer; Joni Simpson – Fairbanks

Membership Chair; Sue Lincoln – Mat-Su Valley

Sean Martin – Homer

Rita Jo Shoultz – Homer/APGA Growers' Cup Recipient

Jon Spiegel – Mat-Su Valley

Angie Johnson – Mat-Su Valley/Regional Rep Transfer!

Industry Liaison; Ko Klaver – lower 48

APGA Executive Administrator; Gary Wells

# Alaska Peony Growers Association For- aker Meeting 3/6/2016 Strategic Plan 2016-2021

## Core Purpose:

Trade Association for Alaska Peonies

## Core Values:

Quality  
Collaboration/cooperation  
Tenacious/calculated risk taker  
Reliable  
Integrity  
Visionary

## Primary customer:

Member (*anyone who wants to follow the core ideology standards*)

Growers  
Packers  
Sellers  
Vendors  
Brokers  
Pack houses--co-op, for profit,  
Independent proprietor  
University  
Government,  
Transportation

## Core Programs: (*It is not a program of the organization to sell or price peonies*)

Education  
Research  
Network  
Government relations  
Quality control for industry  
(*promotion, branding, standards*)  
Clearinghouse to connect growers to the industry

## Primary Economic Driver:

Mission-related earned income

## Long Term Strategic Direction (2019):

Alaska Peonies are an economic force to be reckoned within the US and international markets

## Short Term Goals with Objectives 2016-2021

1. Members and industry engaged through membership, services, support of APGA.
2. Clarify specific tasks where members can be of assistance; ask
3. Increase participation in the conference
4. Increase usage of website
5. Identify and deliver on expectations of most significant members.
6. Increase communication to members and industry;

- update current communications tools
7. Alaska peonies has a recognized national and international brand of quality
8. Identify steps for brand development and implement the process of branding of "Alaska peonies"; APGA standards
9. Write a strategic communications and outreach plan to identify specific audiences and specific activities that will raise the level of awareness about the economic impact of the Alaska peony industry.
10. APGA has a stable and diversified revenue through new services or products that generate earned revenue;  
Conference  
Web sales  
Member services  
Other?
11. Focus is on board development; waiting list of potential qualified enthusiastic board members
12. Ongoing board training and support
13. Aging down board
14. Secure Funding for research like winter die-off

## 2016 Priorities

Communications

National international promotion

Tools

Contracted services

Earned revenue

Member needs

Coherence

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## Alaska Master Gardeners Conference, 2016

Saturday, April 16, Anchorage

Speakers include Pat Holloway, Master Gardeners from around the state, Brian Olson with Alaska Berries, and Marianne Binetti, Pacific Northwest gardening expert. Early registration due by March 28. After that, the fee of \$75 goes up \$10. Price includes presentations, lunch, a Garden Market and reception. For details and on-line registration see [www.alaskamastergardeners.org/](http://www.alaskamastergardeners.org/).  
<<http://www.alaskamastergardeners.org/>>



*Rita Jo Shoultz, 2015 recipient, Piet Wierstra 2016 recipient, Richard Repper, 2016 APGA President*

## PIET WINS!!!

The APGA Growers' Cup is engraved;

“In recognition for your outstanding contribution to the Alaska Cut Flower Industry”

Piet has unquestionably contributed to the success of our membership by volunteering countless hours making himself available sharing his knowledge and a lifetime of experience in the cut flower industry. Year after year Piet has traveled to Alaska and walked our fields with advice on planting, amendments, pathogens, soils, drainage, hydration, harvest, storage, packing, & shipping. Watching Piet's Alaska field tours, I am always amazed at the “swarm” of Alaska peony growers following him up and down each row as he tirelessly and freely shares his abundant knowledge and patiently takes the time to answer all questions no matter how insignificant.

Thank You Piet!

Richard Repper / APGA President 2016

## APGA Growers Cup Lore by Richard Repper

In 2012 a rumor was circulating that Dr. Patricia Holloway would soon be retiring from her position at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Irene Repper insisted that we must find a way for APGA membership to show our appreciation for all the hard work Pat had done to contribute to the success of Alaska's peony growers. I was tasked by Irene with finding a way. But... recognizing Pat's contributions seemed to be just the beginning of recognizing many more of APGA's key players in years to come.

Fortunately, when I was a young lad, one of my Father's financial interests was a trophy business. Dad received contracts to build trophies for the college bowl games of the S.E.C. Conference. The trophies were big and fancy. We always received free tickets to the big games. The post game trophy awards were spectacular events.

After further review, a perpetual trophy fit the bill. Perpetual trophies include; Kentucky Derby, Indianapolis 500, & hockey's Stanley Cup. (and now, THE APGA GROWERS' CUP)

Criteria was established;

- Award presentation will be at the Winter Conference.
- The recipient of the award will be permanently engraved on the trophy with year of recognition.
- The Silver Cup will be held by the recipient for one year.
- Each recipient will be given a commemorative plaque as a keepsake.
- Protocol requires that the current recipient of The Cup makes the hand-off to the new recipient of The Cup at the annual awards banquet.
- Mandatory acceptance speech required.
- Candidates are nominated by APGA members in good standing.
- A list of nominees is voted on by members in good standing for a final tally.
- Results are strictly confidential prior to the award ceremony.

This trophy will grow in size over time. Over the years, the walnut base will be expanded to accommodate the names of additional recipients. Future members can reflect and recognize members from years past.

The APGA Growers Cup will be a perpetual trophy as long as peonies are grown in Alaska. It has become the high-light event at the annual conference banquet.

APGA Growers Cup recipients;

2012 Dr. Patricia Holloway - While displayed in her office at University of Alaska Fairbanks; "I have never seen anything attract so much attention"

2013 Ron Illingworth - "The Cup" survived when Ron's house burned to the ground in 40 below temperatures in North Pole. "The Cup" was found intact under the rubble encased in ice from the fire fighters' pump trucks.

2014 Rita Jo Shoultz - "The Cup" survived intact when Homer was hit by a 7.4 earthquake 1/24/16.

2015 Piet Wierstra - "The Cup" travels outside of Alaska for the first time. - Maybe it's time to put an odometer on "The Cup".

Paparazzi Alert!!! - The next winter conference in Fairbanks presents an opportunity to capture 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 & 2016 APGA Growers' Cup recipients in one photo. Be prepared!

Richard Repper - APGA President 2016

# The following two articles are paid advertising by Alaska Perfect Peony.

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## Blogging: Alaska Perfect Peony Has a New Addition to an Already Great Web Site By Rita Jo Shoultz

A small grant from the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers (ASCFG) was used to add a blog to our web site for peony growers and also to update our Root tab on the web site. While the Root tab features the peony varieties DeVroomen offers for purchase, it has a wealth of information on about 50 varieties. The information provided is based on our experience on our farm but also the input over the past five plus years of experiences of other Alaska farms plus the experience of farms outside Alaska with over 30 years growing peony. I've tried to make sure the varieties we've all tried and failed are not on the web site.

And if the Peninsula has been successful with a variety but not the Interior, I have tried to include that information also.

The Blogging efforts started about six weeks ago and you can see those on our web site. The following blog has not been posted yet. Several of the other blogs already posted include: \*Starting a peony farm, \*Soil preparation, \*Views on planting single or double rows and distances, and \*Irrigation.

### **Blog 8 Making informed decisions**

Just because your Great Aunt's cousin's friend says it -doesn't make it a 'fact'. Taking the time to make informed decisions will save you a lot of angst, time and money. When we were considering growing peony for the cut flower market we received all kinds of 'facts' and opinions.

Our Alaska Peonies are available in July, August and September, the 3rd quarter of the year more commonly referred to as the summer months. The friend of the cousin of your Great Aunt said 'no one gets married in the summer months'. Actually, according to The Wedding Report, 39.5% of weddings take place in the 3rd quarter, making the summer months the most popular months for weddings. Only the single month of June is busier than the summer months. And did you know the average wedding cost in the USA is \$23,000. Certainly they can afford our beautiful Alaska peonies.



*'over 3,800 hits on Facebook when posted'*

In the late 1990s I received a phone call from a commercial photographer from New York. They wanted peony stems for a Body Works commercial. I didn't sell stems. At that time I owned a small retail garden center. I had peonies in my 16 display gardens. These gardens were for the benefit of my garden center customers to see how the plants performed in the gardens versus just a 3 gallon pot on the shelf. To this date I have no idea how they found Alaska peonies. I do remember Judith Wilmarth in Anchorage commonly referred to as the 'peony lady' gave them my name. Judith was the first person to sell stems in Alaska to Carrs. She sold potted peony to Alaska Mill and Feed and other retail outlets.

After several phone calls begging for the stems I came up with an exorbitant price of \$4 per stem. They very excitedly said, can you send them today? I had no boxes, no coolers, no knowledge either about harvesting and shipping peony stems. Today I really don't remember what stage the blooms were when I shipped them. They may have all been totally open. I know they certainly hadn't been cooled the at least 24 hours we require now and I certainly know there was no hydration that went on or any ice packs etc. They paid for the peonies so I guess it worked. I cringe today when I think back on this experience.

Today, my informed decision to run a sustainable farm, which includes a profit margin, based on costs of growing the peony including labor, field maintenance, equipment and depreciation, coolers, the inevitable plant losses each year, insurance

and so forth, is not far from the shoot from the hip \$4 charged to the NY photographers. What I thought was an exorbitant price in actuality might have even been less than required to make a profit growing peony for the commercial cut flower market. The different is now my costs are based on 10 years' experience.

New peony farmers might think they can cut these costs but unless they have figured out how to cut freight costs of obtaining necessary growing supplies, how to make sure they never have any losses in the chain from growing to shipping, how to work 28 hours a day yourself and your wife and kids to avoid

# The Perfect Peony by Rita Jo Shoultz

The perfect peony starts with the harvest and cold chain procedures at our farm. We overlook the frigid waters of Kachemak Bay fed by three glaciers, Grewingk, Portlock and Dixon. The cold air coming off the waters keeps our temperatures mild all summer. This is a good thing for the peony. With the cooler air temperatures, cold soils and the 22 hours of daylight, our peonies grow larger in size and more saturated in color. This is not just my opinion but agreed by such world renowned experts as Don Hollingsworth after visiting our farm and seeing our production.

Harvesting the peony is an art. The time period to harvest is exact, within usually a 5-7 hour window depending on that day's particular weather conditions. Cut too soon and the bud will never open. Cut too late and the flower will blast or open before it reaches its final destination.

Cutting the buds is the hardest job on our farm. Every variety is a bit different in how they should be cut. Some varieties need cutting in a very hard stage while others require a strip of true color and still others with open buds need even more considerations. Our cutters have to be knowledgeable about each variety's particular habit. Several of our varieties are only cut by the most experienced cutters because of the exactness of their requirements.

Getting the field heat out of the peonies immediately is the next exact science in the cold chain procedures. We take the peonies direct from the field to one of our coolers set up specifically for removing field heat. After removing the field heat, our team takes the cooled peonies out of the cooler to quickly remove the lower leaves, grade for bud size, stem length and bundle in 5s. Next 10 bundles of five (50 stems) are put in pristine clean 5 gallon buckets with 5 inches of cold water to hydrate in Chrysal Professional 2T-bags which help prepare stems against transit stress. Finally flowers are moved into our finished products cooler and kept at 33F ready for packing and shipping.

labor costs, how to secure a market without advertising-well you get the picture. Farms not informed, may make decisions guaranteed to fail without the actual facts and costs of growing peonies in Alaska.

Knowing which varieties to grow in your fields should also be based on facts. Our next blog will be about varieties.

Rita Jo Shoultz along with her Son Shannon and Husband Leroy farm on the 25 acre Shoultz Family Farm outside Homer. This year they celebrate 50 years in Fritz Creek and 10 years in the peony business.



*July in our peony field.*

We have a third cooler where we can store peonies not scheduled for immediate shipment. Peonies are dry stored in breathable plastic bags and open boxes in this cooler.

We recommend the end user receive the flowers three days before they are to be used. Upon delivery, we recommend cutting off a 2-4 inches of each stem and rehydrate by putting them in a clean bucket of water with flower food. We use Chrysal products for their effectiveness and ease of use.

We ship in a tight bud unless specifically asked for a different stage. This allows the end user to keep in the cooler for tighter bud use or leave in a warmer area to allow the buds to fully open. The end user can manipulate how they want the buds to open to fit their particular needs.

Rita Jo Shoultz farms in Fritz Creek, AK along with her husband Leroy and son Shannon. They have approximately 15,000 plants in the fields and this is their 10th year of growing peony for the cut flower industry. For more growing information, check out their series of Blogs on their web site [www.alaskaperfectpeony.com](http://www.alaskaperfectpeony.com)

## Calendar

March 22 - April 19, 2016, (7:00-8:30 pm) Season Extension with High Tunnels - an online course through the Northeast Beginning Farmer Project

April 2 (1-4 pm) Intermediate Growers School, Tanana District CES Office

April 16 Alaska Master Gardeners Conference, Anchorage

June 19 & 20<sup>th</sup>, Harvester Certification Training, REGISTRATION REQUIRED

June 25 Soldotna Summer Farm Tour– Leslie Cooper, Rep.

July 22 & 23<sup>rd</sup> Interior Summer Farm Tour– Annie Keep-Barnes, Rep.

July 23 - Homer Summer Farm Tour – Melissa Saltzman, Rep.

July 30 - Mat-Su Summer Farm Tour – Sue Lincoln, Rep.

January 27-29, 2017 APGA Winter Conference, Fairbanks, AK

## HELP NEEDED NOW!

Mingchu Zhang will write a proposal to Alaska Division of Agriculture specialty grants to get more funding for soil and plant fertility studies. He needs letters of support from growers. This funding period is for the summer 2017. Contact Mingchu for a sample letter, IMMEDIATELY.

Mingchu Zhang <mzhang3@alaska.edu>

### New Regional Rep, Homer

I want to thank you all for your support and guidance as I have accepted the APGA Representative position. I can only hope that I do a well enough job to bring pride to APGA. If there are any suggestions or comments you want to share with me, please don't hesitate to reach out. Your guidance is greatly appreciated.

Melissa Saltzman, <mlsaltzman@yahoo.com>

### APGA Board of Directors

Richard Repper - Soldotna, President  
Patty Floyd - Nikiski, Vice President  
Joni Simpson - Fairbanks, Treasurer  
Wanda Haken - Nenana, Secretary  
Ron Illingworth - North Pole, Past President  
Harry Davidson - Wasilla, Past President  
Betty Joslyn - Homer  
Gary Lincoln - Willow  
Ko Klaver - Industry liaison

### Regional Reps:

Melissa Saltzman - Homer  
Annie Keep-Barnes - Interior  
Leslie Cooper - Kenai  
Sue Lincoln - Mat-Su Valley

### APGA Committees

Conference - Ron Illingworth  
Membership - Open  
Promotion - Open  
Web - Open  
Research - Jill Russell  
Newsletter - Jan Hanscom  
Government Affairs Liaison - Ron Illingworth  
Nominations - Ron Illingworth

### APGA Administrator

Gary Wells