Selling Arrangements for the Alaska Peony Season 2013

As our peony season approaches, many of Alaska’s peony farms are working together to sell their stems. Here’s a look at what’s going on around the state.

We have been working to develop a co-op for the Interior region for several years now, so this is not a fast process. North Pole Peonies, Polar Peonies, and other Interior growers have joined together in a cooperative arrangement under the marketing name of Arctic Alaska Peonies. North Pole and Polar Peonies serve as the two primary packhouses for the co-op.

We’ve known all along, however, that a cooperative could not be just about the packhouses. All of the current and potential Interior producers provide vital input to the co-op to create a well-functioning entity that serves the needs of the majority while still taking into account the needs and concerns of the two main packhouses.

We face logistical problems such as dealing with the large distance between many of our farms and developing a multi-farm peony inventory system. We anticipate that in the future we will have several sub-regional packhouses (e.g., Delta Junction and Nenana) and/or collection points to maintain quality and reduce transportation costs.

The big picture for Arctic Alaska Peonies? Ordering supplies together, providing a central selling and marketing point, branding Arctic Alaska Peonies, and sharing stems as needed to fill orders.

Email chris@northpolepeonies.com (Chris Beks) or myself at polarpeonies@gmail.com for more information.

MAT-SU

From MIKE WILLIAMS, ALASKA PEONY DISTRIBUTORS

Alaska Peony Distributors, LLC is a commercial peony pack house created to support the needs of the expanding peony industry in Alaska. Its immediate focus is to provide services to the rapidly developing peony farms in the Susitna and...
Selling Arrangements (cont’d)

Matanuska River Valleys. Our mission is simple: "constantly strive to secure the best price possible for our participating farms in the domestic and international market." We are a full service pack house providing transportation of stems from farm to pack house, year round marketing and sales, and a full time staff. Our goal is to focus on all the logistics required to get your stems to market allowing “farmers to be farmers”. No matter how large or small your farm maybe we can meet your post-harvest needs and more.

Alaska Peony Distributors, LLC is to be strategically located in the west Wasilla/Meadow Lakes area to support growers from Trapper Creek to Palmer. Our transportation network can easily expand to include more distant farms also. Pack house doors will open for the 2013 season on 1 June. For more information contact Meghan Williams, General Manager, APD, LLC at alaskapeonydistributors@gmail.com.

state-wide cooperative, federated or otherwise, after other regional cooperatives are formed. We actually view our cooperative as an attempt to “work out the details”, of which, we are finding out, there are quite a few.

These are our logistics: Each grower is responsible for chilling their stems at least 8 hours and delivering the chilled peonies to the co-op’s “collection point(s)”. At that point the co-op assumes a “consignment” of peonies - we do not buy the peonies directly from the growers. Instead, the net profit from the peonies are distributed to the growers at the end of the season after expenses have been subtracted from the gross income. The peonies are then transported to the central packhouse where they are stripped, graded, bunched, and packed.

We want to have all co-op members serve on the Board of Directors this first year as we work to build trust amongst ourselves and to address problems communally. After this year, we will hold Board elections.

We have much to do and really, practically speaking, not enough time to do it. The magnitude of what we’re undertaking is gradually becoming evident. Although the co-op’s members range from 5th-year to “going-to-plant-this-fall” growers and we all know that we’ll face seemingly insurmountable problems, we are hopeful that the effort we put into this will serve us, and all Alaska growers, in the long run. After all, as a good friend of mine just mentioned, “as the pie keeps getting larger, our own individual slices will too”.

ELSEWHERE

Rumor has it that cooperatives may be forming in the Homer and Mat-Su areas. Contact Shelley Rainwater (shelley@glacierpeonies.com) for news about Homer.

In addition, the APGA Board is looking into the options and logistics for forming a state-wide cooperative. Contact APGA President, Harry Davidson (hdavidson852@gmail.com) if you are interested more information concerning a statewide organization.

KENAI-SOLDOTNA
By SUE KENT, ALASKA PEONY MARKET

Nine growers in the Kenai-Soldotna area have joined together to form the Alaska Peony Market Cooperative. Although we have discussed cooperative buying, we are focused on cooperative marketing with a big picture concept of eventually joining a larger
Greetings from the desk of your new APGA president. Let me introduce myself. My name is Harry Davidson. My wife Judi and I own North Star Peony Farm in the Mat-Su Valley. We have lived in the Valley for 30 years where we raised our family. We have been developing the farm for 4 or 5 years now and planted our first roots 3 years ago this summer. I was elected to APGA’s board at last winter’s conference and board meeting. I was elected president at this winter’s conference and board meeting.

First, I want to say “thank you” to our outgoing president, Ron Illingworth. He has served as president for more than 4 years and has done an outstanding job of leading APGA from its infancy to where it is today. We now have about 100 members and are at a critical stage as an organization. Many of our founding members are now marketing their flower cuts, with an anticipated Alaska-wide harvest near 100,000 stems for the 2013 season. Over the next 2 or 3 years the harvest will likely be close to 1 million cuts. It is easy to see that we need to pay close attention to marketing NOW.

As our new president, marketing will be my primary focus. APGA’s role in marketing needs to be defined. Should APGA be involved in active marketing or should it be primarily a trade organization that promotes and facilitates the Peony industry in Alaska? Should APGA create a new organization that is dedicated to marketing? Should this new organization be a non-profit farmers marketing co-op? Do we need regional packing houses to handle the cuts and should they be part of a co-op? How quickly can we move on these issues?

Decisions need to be made about these issues and more. And time is of the essence. 100,000 cuts this summer and a million cuts in a few short years. We are already behind on this new phase of our Alaska Peony industry, and I feel a sense of urgency. Can we have a farmers marketing co-op up and running by this summer? Not only do I think we can, I think we must.

As an organization we have an amazing wealth of knowledge, resources and energy to move forward into addressing these issues. It is an exciting time for all of us. Let us move into the future together and start writing the next chapter of this amazing story called “The Alaska Peony Adventure”.

New President Harry and out-going President Ron at 2013 Winter Conference in Fairbanks.

Year 2 of APGA’s Fertility Study Starts Soon

As many of you know, APGA was awarded a grant for conducting a 2-year soil and peony plant nutritional study as part of the Alaska Division of Agriculture’s 2011 Alaska Grown Specialty Crop Competitive Grant Program. The work began in 2012 and will continue this year. The project consists of collecting soil and peony leaf samples from both Alaska fields and from Outside peony farms. Sample bags and laboratory request sheets will be sent out to last year’s participants in the coming weeks. If you are interested in learning more about this study or participating in the study, contact Marji Illingworth at marji@northpolepeonies.com.
2013 Winter Conference Highlights

The first annual “APGA Cup” was awarded to Dr. Pat Holloway from UAF for her outstanding contribution to the development of the Alaska peony industry. Shown from left are APGA President Harry Davidson, APGA Cup Committee Chair Richard Repper, Dr. Holloway, and former APGA President Ron Illingworth.

Daisy Lee Bitter was presented with an original painting by Taffina Katksu for her work to compile statewide information concerning the success or failure growers have experienced with different peony varieties grown in Alaska.

The conference included an artist exhibit featuring many local artists. Shown is a peony painting by Jean Lester of Ester, Alaska.
2013 Winter Conference Highlights

APGA Board of Directors, from top left: Richard Repper, Ron Illingworth (out-going President), Harry Davidson (newly elected President), Rachel Christy, Virginia Young (Treasurer), Sue Kent (Secretary), Patti Floyd (newly elected Director), Shelley Rainwater (Vice President), and Sue Lincoln (newly elected Director).

Out-going President Ron Illingworth congratulating Harry Davidson on his election as APGA President.

One of the conference's many break-out sessions.
The APGA newsletter SPRING 2013

ALASKA PEONY GROWERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
1231 W. Northern Lights Blvd #500 | Anchorage AK 99503 | 907 887 1268 | www.alaskapeonies.org

Thank You Marji Illingworth & Your Entire Conference Committee for a Fabulous Conference!
And many many thanks to APGA’s wonderful supporters & sponsors, including:

Alaska Division of Agriculture
Cooperative Extension Service
Georgeson Botanical Garden
SNRAS
Alaska Packaging
Bulb Trading Company
Cutting Edge Machine Shop
Wildlife and Wood

Florabundance
Flowerbulbs & Perennials Direct
GCI
Gene’s Auto
Lynden
Pioneer Equipment
Tammy Phillips

Welcome APGA’s New Administrator

APGA welcomes our new Administrator, Gary Wells. Gary comes to us with a wealth of experience in managing non-profit organizations, including all areas of staff management; independent fund raising campaigns; negotiations and relationships; volunteer recruitment and training; board management; staff management; risk management; computerized mail solicitations and donor information systems; community organization; annual and long-range planning; management of budgets; annual audits, door-to-door and major gifts campaigns; foundation and corporate solicitations; special events; mediation and arbitration. He has 30 years experience as a Mediator and Arbitrator. Gary is now the official point of contact for APGA. He has established our mailing address and phone number.
Dr. Holloway’s Thank You!

February 28, 2013

Dear members of the Alaska Peony Growers Association:

Ever since I was a little kid, nobody could pull a surprise on me. Each Christmas, I carefully peeked into every present under the tree just so I would know in advance what I was getting. I am a consummate plotter and planner. I arrive early for meetings; I have things organized and laid out well ahead of time; I usually know what to expect and am prepared for contingencies.

Well, all my planning and preparedness were blown out the window by the Grower’s Cup you presented to me at the APGA winter conference. It truly amazes me that I had no clue what was coming. I don’t know how many people planned this award, but not one person spilled the beans! I knew you were a talented group, but knowing how well I ferret things out, I am truly impressed by my total ignorance!

As I said at the meeting, I am honored to be the first recipient of your Grower’s Cup. I have worked for 40 years with all kinds of people in Alaska horticulture and have never watched anything blossom like our peony industry. I think about all the serendipitous events, the research projects, the budget issues, and the grand parade of diverse personalities I have worked with and encountered in the past 12 years, and I am awed by what we have accomplished. You might not have started down this road without my research, but I certainly wouldn’t still be traveling down this road if it hadn’t been for some nervy, creative, visionary people who took a chance on a wild and crazy idea.

Thank you so much for your support and your acknowledgement of the value of my research in what you are creating. I’m sure you know I will do my very best to continue to support this industry in any way I can.

Sincerely,

Patricia S. Holloway
Professor of Horticulture
The APGA board approved a grading system for Alaska peony cut flowers as well as recommendations for bunching peonies. The new Alaska grades are a blend of the existing USDA (primarily a length criteria) and New Zealand grades (primarily a bud size criteria) for peony cut flowers. The newly-established grades are a first step in developing a state-wide quality control system. The Board plans to develop an “APGA-Quality” logo that can be used by participating growers to show that they promote and market using the Alaska grades.

### ALASKA CUT-PEONY GRADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE**</th>
<th>OVERALL LENGTH (STEM + BUD)</th>
<th>BUD DIAMETER</th>
<th>STEMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USDA No. 1</td>
<td>≥ 60 cm (24 in)</td>
<td>≥ 25 mm</td>
<td>Trimmed and fairly straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 35 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy (AA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 40 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Fancy (AAA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 45 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA No. 2</td>
<td>≥ 45 cm (18 in)</td>
<td>≥ 25 mm</td>
<td>Not overly curved or crooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 35 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy (AA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 40 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Fancy (AAA)</td>
<td></td>
<td>≥ 45 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALASKA CUT-PEONY BUNCHING

1. Bunches contain either 5 or 10 stems unless specified otherwise by the customer.
2. The buds in each bunch are reasonably uniform in size and development and stems are reasonably uniform in length.
3. The base of the stems in each bunch is relatively level, with no more than a 2-inch offset between the longest and shortest stems, so when placed in water, the base of all stems will be submerged.
4. The buds in each bunch are arranged such that they form a relatively flat surface across the top of the bunch and form a pleasing appearance.
5. Each bunch is held intact by two rubber bands, referred to as the upper and lower rubber bands. Recommendations for the rubber bands are:
   a. No. 30 (2 x 1/8”) rubber band, doubled, and placed 3 to 4 inches from the base of the stem for the “lower” rubber band.
   b. No. 18 (3 x 1/16”) rubber band, not doubled, and placed 5 to 6 inches from the base of the buds for the “upper” rubber band.

**The “standard” No. 1 and No. 2 grades are based on the USDA United States Standards for Grades of Cut Peonies in the Bud, effective April 1, 1938, reprinted January 1997. The Select, Fancy, and Extra Fancy grades are Alaska definitions not defined by the USDA.**

ADOPTED: 25 MARCH 2013. CORRECTED: 09 APRIL 2013
Shipping with FedEx

From PATTY MCLAUGHLIN, FEDEX

Do you use QuickBooks, Peachtree or any other 3rd party software? We can integrate the FedEx software so you don’t have to re-type your customer’s shipping information when creating a label, and the tracking number can be written back to your customer’s file in your accounting software for future reference.

Do you need a FedEx account? You can open both a FedEx parcel account as well as a FedEx freight account and receive the generous discounts FedEx has set up for APGA members. It is so easy….just call me, Patty McLaughlin, at 800-513-5591 ext. 8430. I will help you open the accounts with the special pricing attached to it.

There are a few ways for shipping with FedEx. The first is small package express (air), ground and International shipments. What is small package shipping? It’s up to 150 pounds and less than 119 inches in length and 165 inches in girth.

If your shipment is over 150 pounds, or a crate/pallet, or longer than 119 inches in length, then you will need to ship via LTL (less than truckload). That will be under a different account number than your small package account. However, you don’t have to know your LTL account number — we keep track of that for you. Just request the shipment to come to you via FedEx LTL.

How do you create a FedEx shipping label? Easy at fedex.com. We will train you on how to create a shipment, track a package, and check your invoices. Also we can show you how to create an address book so you don’t have to retype all of your customer’s shipping information with every order.

Growing your business internationally? FedEx will set up each grower with each country you want to ship to. Once you are set up, your shipments will be delivered without an issue. But you need to let me know as soon as possible because the process can take 2 to 4 weeks with our legal department.

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Harvesting Knives

If you weren’t able to get them at the Winter Alaska Peony Conference, you can still order your peony harvesting knives (3” stainless curved blade) and highly durable UV resistant Ultra High Molecular Weight (UHMW) polyethylene bud gauges through APGA. For $7.50 each or $15 per set, you can add these tools to your peony harvest program. If interested, please email Carolyn at polarpeonies@gmail.com for more information – orders taken through April 30th.
Hug a Horsetail
(i.e. give that noxious weed some love)
From MICHELLE LAFRINIÈRE, CHILLY ROOT PEONY FARM, HOMER

It’s February now and there’s an array of seed catalogs fanned out around me; on one side is peony wholesale types and on the other is the garden/herb/perennial variety. This is better than shopping for shoes! And so much better than watching ice sickles drip.

In the back of one catalog, I found Horsetail Butter for sale -- more of a body butter than a bread butter. Last year I came across Horsetail Tea (equisetum arvense) as well, even though it was $6.50 for a box of 50 bags -- I purchased it to remind myself of all the untapped possibilities growing at my feet. Horsetail is that plant we all love to hate. It is so tenacious, every year I feel like I simply go through the exercise of pulling out the same equisetum I pulled out the year before; like Ground Hog’s Day -- over and over. Since it is the sole survivor of a line of plants that go back 400 million years (Equisetaceae family) I can understand how impossible it is to eject from the soil.

In an effort to change the way I relate to this plant, I started a little research. I already knew horsetail contains 35% silica and makes a great pot scrubber when we’re camping, but I just learned it can be used to sand wood as well! I’ve seen the extract added to hair care products but didn’t really think about why. Silica, which helps form the collagen in skin and bones, also proves cuticles and nails. Well, there’s a farmer’s friend right there! If reading this gives you the hankering to mow-down on this herb -- be aware that it may cause levels of vitamin B1 (thiamin) to drop in the body. Taking a multi-B supplement is advisable. I found the University of Maryland Medical Center has done research on the benefits of horsetail as well as Utah State University.

Silica is found in every tissue and organ in the body, skin, hair, teeth, bones, tendons and ligaments. It builds and strengthens cell walls and studies show equisetum may help osteoporosis. What it does for human cells it does for plant cells, helping plants resist pathogens, resist cold damage and recover from wind damage. I found that the European farmer commonly uses horsetail extract as an effective fungicide. The plant contains trace amounts of nicotine. They use it most specifically for ‘black-spot’ on rose crops and rust on mint fields and mildew on strawberries.

When you see that patch of horsetail reaching toward the sun, envision those plants capable of accumulating gold, cadmium, copper, lead and zinc from the soil, effectively clean-

Horsetail is that plant we all love to hate.
Equisitum (cont’d)

Horsetail Tea
Collect the horsetail, foliage, stems, rhizomes and all.
For each 28g (1 oz) pour on 1.1 litres (2 pt) hot, not boiling, water.
Let stand for twenty-four hours.
Strain off the ‘tea’ and use undiluted.

Horsetail Fungicide Concentrate for Spray
In a glass or stainless steel pot, mix 1/8 cup of dried horsetail leaves/stems/roots- chopped- to 1 gallon of rain water or unchlorinated water. You can let chlorinated tap water sit for 2 days in an open container to allow the chlorine to escape.

Simmer for a minimum of one half hour. Cool, strain through cheese cloth. This extract will keep for a month in your glass jar; be sure to label it.

Dilute the extract 5 to 10 parts water to 1 part concentrate. Spray infected plants 1 to 2 times a week or use as a preventative once a week to every other week and especially when weather conditions could cause stress to the plants.

(PS-- be sure to add the limp equisetum leftovers to your compost pile! -- yum yum)

Babble from the Bumbling Farmer

By MICHAEL WILLIAMS, EAGLE SONG FAMILY PEONY FARM

We’ve turned the corner on winter and all of a sudden spring is bearing down on us. As I was loading up 1600 lbs. of lime in my pickup at Alaska Mill & Feed a couple of days ago I started thinking about farm labor. Curious! I’ve noticed it always seems to be a common topic of discussion among peony farmers.

“How are you going to get help for your farm?...I don’t know, where are you going to get help?” At that point the discussions always seem to end. It’s a good question, an important question and a very difficult question. How will we meet our farm labor needs?

The answer is as diverse as the peony farms within Alaska. Family is always the first answer, but it never seems to be enough. Those of you that live close to population centers may be able to draw on high school students, teachers or retirees that can come to your farm each day and go home at the end of the day.
Farm Labor (cont’d)

Those that have more remote farms have the added burden of housing and meals for workers. It is too far for workers to commute so an adequate work force will likely have to stay on or close to the farm. In my case I am completely off the road system and must fly my workers to the farm. I am building a series of 1 room cabins for workers to live in during the season. Our kitchen has been expanded to accommodate the added meals that must be prepared. We took advantage of the NRCS high tunnel program last year and now have a 20’ x 32’ high tunnel for growing fresh vegetables to help reduce the added cost of food. It seems like a vicious cycle, but necessary. This explains how I will deal with workers, but where will they come from?

The fish industry is similar in many ways to the peony industry. One of those similarities is the need for common labor. How are they meeting cannery, processor and deckhand needs? There is no one answer, but they do put some effort into recruiting programs. College students are prime candidates for a number of reasons. They are always looking for summer jobs to offset expenses. They are looking for adventure and new experiences. A college student may return for 2-3 seasons before graduating and starting a career. Many college students come to Alaska to work in the tourism industry each season too. It seems to me the Alaska peony industry might want to look into some recruiting of its own.

Another program worth looking into is the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms program. Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, USA (WWOOF-USA®) is part of a worldwide effort to link visitors with organic farmers, promote an educational exchange, and build a global community conscious of ecological farming. You don’t have to be an organic farm to participate. We are all trying to be good stewards of the land and that is what counts. I encourage you to check out this program at http://www.wwoofusa.org/. I have 2 WWOOFers coming to work on my farm this summer. The catch is you must provide housing and meals in exchange for labor.

An excellent thought that came up at the Mat-Su growers meeting in early March was let prospective growers come work a few days on your farm to really see what it’s all about and gain some practical experience.

I’ve noticed nothing comes easy in this business, but ingenuity and effort will lead us in the right direction. I wish you the best in all you set out to achieve this summer.

Where are you going to get help for your farm?...

In Alaska you always need a good dog for bear protection too.
ALASKA PERFECT PEONY
From RITA JO SHOULTZ, HOMER

In the seven years I’ve been growing peony for the cut flower market, I’ve heard a lot of ‘C’ words. There’s ‘CO’operate, ‘CO’-llaborate, ‘CO’-ordinate, ‘CO’-ops, ‘CO’-exist.

These words all appear to me to be an effort to work together some way. I think most growers are interested in working together to share information; evident by the conference successes over the past 5 years. So that’s pretty much a given. How much more “CO” everyone wants to do and how to do it seems to be a huge struggle for many of us right now.

In the world of never-never land, the idea of a huge pack house that would serve all people and meet every need of every grower would be ideal. But then you take into consideration the distance from my farm to Polar Peony in Fairbanks, the fact than many of the older, larger farms have already built their own pack houses, and (dare I mention) the individuality of Alaskans. We all know because day-to-day living in Alaska is often about survival versus la la land in the lower 48 where their biggest challenge of any day might be deciding what kind of coffee to get at Starbucks that morning. We Alaskans are just a bit more challenged in our daily lives therefore, necessarily, a bit more opinionated and anxious to be in control of any given situation.

Before you can get anywhere, you have to figure out where you are now. A safe estimate of numbers is probably 35 farms at this time ranging in size from only a couple of hundred plants to maybe 15,000, the largest at this point. The ages of the farms range from first year to seven years in maturity. The distance from farms is up to 600 miles. Accessibility between farms is another challenge with some farms off the main roads and one farm off any road.

Quality control issues require immediate cooling of cuts. A pack house/cooler located 600 miles from your farm doesn’t work. Therefore a central pack house/cooler probably isn’t practical. So what if each farm has a cooler and performs all the steps that take place before the cooler, ie stripping of leaves, sorting by stem length and bud size and bunching. Then after the cooling process is complete, would you transport your bunches in boxes or ?? and ship to a central pack house with a central cooler to be packaged and shipped? Is that practical?

I’ve been wrestling with these ideas for 7 years and have tried out a few, some not discussed above. I certainly do not have the ultimate solution but feel there is room for more “CO”. Perhaps a cooperative marketing program where everyone still does their own harvest, cooling, packing and shipping; but the co-op would have a system for making sure quality control issues are met, shipping procedures and prices are consistent and we have a reliable market. Keeping in mind, anytime you “CO” someone else is going to have some input on how you do your business and they will need to be paid for that service. Is that something independent Alaskans are willing to do? Give up a portion of control and pay for it?

Sometimes it takes a while for ideas to formulate. This summer while you are weeding, cutting, cooling, packing, and finally collecting money, think about what you would like not to be doing. Maybe that is where we start trying to figure out which “CO” will work for us.

Rita Jo asks, “Who wants to “CO”?

Rita Jo farms with her Husband Leroy and Son Shannon in Fritz Creek (just outside Homer) They have 15,000 peony in the fields with the oldest plants seven years old.
Those of us who have grown peonies in our gardens for decades knew that peonies grow well here, so what sparked the fire for growing them in Alaska for the cut flower market?

It was the dedicated research efforts of the talented Dr. Patricia Holloway, director of the Georgeson Botanical Garden at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks who paved the path of inspiration for the pioneer peony farmers in the Tanana Valley.

In 1998 Dr. Holloway learned about the absence of peonies in the world cut flower market during the summer. Being an expert Alaskan horticulturist, she knew that Alaskan grown peonies are prime in July, August, and early September.

By 2001 she had 150 peony roots planted in research plots. She had found a world market niche for an Alaskan farm product. By 2004 peony farms were started near Fairbanks and nearby North Pole, Alaska.

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Dr. Holloway knew that the rest of the world had heard the exciting news when she received a phone call from London requesting a minimum order of 100,000 stems each week.

Two farms were started on the Homer bench in 2006 and by 2012 over a dozen of us had peony farms on the peninsula. At the state conference in Fairbanks last week we
DAISY LEE (CONT’D)

helped train over 50 new Alaskan peony farmers.

© Daisy Lee Bitter
February 23, 2013

(P.S. Daisy Lee writes that she’s 5’6” tall and she’s standing in her photograph with the Red Charm peonies. What makes them grow so tall?, you might ask. She feeds them her homemade compost! Photograph by Lori Jenkins.

NORTH POLE PEONIES

From MARJI ILLINGWORTH, FAIRBANKS

Hopefully winter is almost over, after -30 below for three nights last week, it finally broke the freezing mark the last two days and last night was only 0! There is hope!

Must say this has been a strange winter in the Interior – cold, snow, rain, even a rainbow in January! And of course, terribly icy roads that are just now beginning to clear.

We, of course, attended the 2013 APGA Winter Conference. We had a great time and learned a lot. We also attended the 2013 Bridal Show Case in Fairbanks. It is fun introducing peonies to our local brides. Made some interesting contacts with brides and other bridal service providers.

We are now looking forward to Spring! Even the grandchildren are anxious to get into the peony fields. They are already making their plans on how to be able to spend more time helping out.

This year our packhouse operation should pickup as several of the local growers will start having their own cuts to bring to us.

With over 2000 new roots coming in this Spring, we will be busy. Hopefully, all the field prep we did last fall will make the planting easier.

Happy Spring and great growing season!

Ron, Marji, Elizabeth and Chris!
APGA Board Members

Harry Davidson, President
Rachel Christy, MATSU
Patti Floyd, SOL
Jan Hanscom, FBX
Ron Illingworth, FBX
Sue Kent, Secretary
Sue Lincoln, MATSU
Richard Repper, SOL
Shelly Rainwater, Vice President
Virginia Young, Treasurer

For Your Calendars
April 7 Interior Peony Growers meeting (CES Room)
April 13 (9am-4pm) Kenai Ag Forum, Challenger Learning Center (Kenai)
May 27 (3-5 pm) Spring planting clinic (North Pole Peonies)
May 29 (6-9 pm) Spring planting clinic (North Pole Peonies)
June 8 (1-4 pm) New grower’s school (Kenai-Soldotna)
July 6 (1-4 pm) Nikiski area farm tours
July 9 (6:30-8:30 pm) Picking clinic (North Pole Peonies)
July 10 (2-4 pm) Picking clinic (North Pole Peonies)
July 26 or 27 (tentative) Interior farm tour
August 3 (1-4 pm) Sterling area farm tours
August 17 (1-4 pm) Echo Lake area farm tours (Soldotna)

NEXT ISSUE

Farm Equipment Month!!!
We all have tractors or implements that we love. For the next newsletter, send in photos of it and include a few lines about why it’s so valuable to you or a little bit about its history!

Email your photos to:
sue@midnightsunpeonies.com or newsletter@alaskapeonies.org.