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## ASA Conventions

Tadeusz Dauksza — Orland Park, Illinois

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There's nothing quite like an Azalea Society of America convention! It's a great big family reunion of sorts, an exciting kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and smells, and an unusual exposure to the world of rhododendrons, azaleas, annuals and perennials, woodland flowers, trees and other shrubs, all rolled up into one wonderful experience.

These conventions are many things. They are hectic, informative, nostalgic, very friendly, fun. There are so many other memories: Seminars by great speakers about subjects they know first hand from experience. Happy hours. Waiting in line. Book sales. Eating. Clapping. Getting up early. Going to bed late. Losing your nametag. Speeches. Reports. Laughing. Reminiscing. Taking pictures. Packing and Unpacking. Rain, heat. Meetings. Door prizes. Auctions. Awards. Checking in and out. Rushing to catch the plane. Looking for the best and closest parking place. Loading up the copious amount of plants that you bought. Elevator rides. Trying to read-decipher plant tags. Trying as heck to recall people's names.

You ooh and ah through gardens and arboreta that you wished your garden would look like but never does. You jot down the names of countless azaleas, rhodies, companion plants. You see breathtaking sights—mountains, lakes, sunrises and sunsets.

And then there's the plant sale! A no-holds-barred battle royal of normally nice, civil folks temporarily crazed by the thought that someone else might get the plants he or she can't live without. Waiting for the plant sale to open (usually after dinner) is like watching a group of great white sharks circling for the kill on the Discovery Channel. The tactics of the veteran plant sale shopper in out-maneuvering and out-conning, by saying "That plant does not do well," should be studied as to what drives us to this madness. Azaleaphiles go to great lengths in driving long, long distances, emptying the trunks of cars for more room, and packing the plants (UPS should study the methods). What's the normal response you usually hear? "I don't know where I am going to plant these!!"

But the main attraction of the convention is the people. ASA members are the greatest in the world. I never met a member I didn't like. Nowhere is the charm and friendliness of members more apparent than at our conventions. Attendees come from all areas of this globe and all walks of life. Some are professional, many are amateurs. You see old friends and make many, many new ones. You place their faces with the articles that they wrote in *The Azalean*, their gardens that you have visited on the tours, and you thank them for sharing their corner of the world with you. You meet our "volunteer lead-

ers." You hear about where we're heading and where we have been. You hobnob with the greats, and the greats-to-be. You talk with legends. You stand and pay tribute to the people who have made our Society what it is today.

A lot of truly dedicated people knock themselves out to make our conventions exciting and trouble-free. They spend an unbelievable number of hours to accommodate a very diverse group of people. It's a frustrating, Herculean task; but somehow, they do it, never asking for a dime in return. We are lucky that we have human beings like that. If you like azaleas, you'll like an ASA convention. If you like new things, new places, new excitement, you'll enjoy an ASA convention. If you like people, you'll love an ASA convention.

On behalf of the Lake Michigan Chapter of ASA, I cordially welcome you to attend the annual ASA convention scheduled for May 19-22, 2005, in Holland, Michigan. Registration details will be available soon on the Society Web site, [www.azaleas.org](http://www.azaleas.org) and in the Winter 2004 issue of *The Azalean*.

*Tadeusz Dauksza is a board member of the Lake Michigan Chapter of the ASA and the membership renewal chair of the Midwest Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.*