President’s Letter

Rick Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia

I wanted to start this message with more good news for the society. We have just added a new chapter, the Texas Forest Country Chapter in Jasper, Texas. Jasper has been a hotbed of activity this year with 16 new members joining the society and the designation of Jasper as an Azalea City. The city of Jasper has been an enthusiastic supporter of azaleas and the new chapter. They have provided an area for the chapter to meet and have also gained state funding for a city beautification project including azaleas. Congratulations to the new chapter members and their president, Robert Thau. Robert is known as “Mr. Azalea” in the Jasper area and has worked with city officials, the Chamber of Commerce, and Master Gardeners to promote azaleas and the ASA in Jasper.

The events in Jasper capped off a very successful year for the society. In April we had a very successful convention in Little Rock, Arkansas. This was the first time the society had met in the state of Arkansas. It would not have been possible without the assistance of Janet Carson and the Arkansas Master Gardeners as well as the small cadre of ASA members we had living in the state. Allen Owings and the Louisiana Chapter stepped to the plate for the second year in a row to take part in the planning and execution of the convention and to provide financial support. We also tried something new in conducting an Azaleas 101 seminar for the first time. It was an excellent opportunity to showcase azaleas to an audience of Master Gardeners. It also increased the membership rolls of the society, since each attendee received a half year membership in the society. As a result of this increased presence in the state, we were able to establish a new chapter, the Arkansas Chapter, with Ronnie Palmer as the first president.

In June we designated Robbinsville, NC, as an Azalea City and participated in their first annual Native Azalea Festival. A number of society members participated in the festivities and we thank the residents of Robbinsville and Graham County for their hospitality and their support in promoting native azaleas.

I have been pleased with the growth in the Legacy Project. We continue to add hybrid groups and there are ongoing efforts to propagate these azaleas and get them out to the general public. There are also efforts at the chapter level to work with public gardens to introduce or enhance their collections of Legacy azaleas.

I’m excited about the upcoming convention in Charleston. We were there several years ago and saw some outstanding gardens, though we were a little early for peak blooms. I’m hoping to see some spectacular azaleas and hear interesting speakers...plus, Charleston is a wonderful city to visit. I hope to see many of you at the convention.

Hopefully we will continue the momentum we’ve started this year. We have produced a manual with good ideas for having successful chapters. We hope that members at the local level will incorporate some of these ideas to gain and retain members. We are always looking for other ideas that we can share across the society. Besides the enjoyment of azaleas, one of my main reasons for being in the society is the people. I have enjoyed socializing with our society members this year and look forward to 2019.