

Computerizing the Awards System

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The computerization of the AOS Awards System is an ongoing, evolutionary, multi-step process. Several of the most critical steps of this process have been accomplished and after several years of programming and testing, only a few remain. We would like to report our progress.

When Lee Cooke, executive director of the Society, asked the Information Systems subcommittee to examine the possibility of computerizing the AOS Awards System in early 1995, John E. Miller and I went into action to see what it would take to accomplish the task. We spent time with Jenifer Latourneau, then the awards registrar, at Headquarters and detailed the entire process from the time an award has been given at a judging center or show to the issuance of a certificate and the announcement of the award in *Awards Quarterly*.

Although there was an old *dBase II* database program in place where all award information was being kept, it was fragmented and only dated back to 1986. Summaries being sent from the judging centers had to be typed into three different database programs by hand; certificate forms were sent out to be hand calligraphed, and then sent to be signed by the president and chair of the Judging Committee. Slides were catalogued separately and stored in large slide trays. The process, from award to publication in *Awards Quarterly* (assuming prompt forwarding of summary information from the centers, invoicing and payment), took from six to nine months on the average.

Our objective was clear. We were to reduce or eliminate the hand processing by the registrar by automating the process from center to Headquarters, automate the production of certificates, and modernize and integrate the utilization of the various database records information. If we could accomplish this, we knew we could greatly reduce the time (and cost) it took to process an award, and could make available the award information to the centers well before the award was published in *Awards Quarterly*.

The major task was to rewrite the Headquarters' program integrating all of the various components of the awards and judging system. This program was written by Ursula Hoffman and me in Microsoft FoxPro, a database program compatible with the old database record system. The award components included a program for the entry and retrieval of award data, an invoicing program, the preparation and printing of certificates, the production of *Awards Quarterly* text for publication, a slide data entry and retrieval program, and the entry and retrieval of new orchid hybrids for printing in *Orchids*. The judging components included the data files for all judging personnel, and the sanctioning and maintenance of data pertaining to all AOS-judged shows.

The program has been implemented and has been operating successfully for close to two years. The quicker turn-around time from award to publication and the new computer-generated certificates being distributed now are direct results of this stage of the computerization.

The second task of the project – automating the transfer of award summary data from the Judging Centers to Headquarters – is also nearing completion. Again, Hoffman and I wrote an AOS Judging Center Program to accomplish this. The chief purpose of this program is to provide the judging centers with a uniform method of entering and

forwarding the award data to the AOS registrar electronically, and to provide a method of maintaining awards, provisional status awards, attendance and show records for each center. As an important but secondary role, the program also includes the entire historical award database of the AOS, recently completed from 1970 through the present. This historical data, retrieved through this program, has proven invaluable for students and judges researching plants brought in for judging at our "beta" sites. Also included in the program are the judging personnel records for the entire AOS system, and the New Orchid Hybrids lists from the last printing of *Sander's* (1995) to present.

To date, 14 of the 27 judging centers have received and begun using the new AOS Judging Center Program. Although these judging centers must send their award summary information by floppy disk at the present time, by spring we expect to complete the integration of a communications module into the program, which will allow each center to send and retrieve award information automatically via a dial-up communications modem link.

Next, we start all over and rewrite the entire program in the latest Visual FoxPro 5.0, a high-speed, 32-bit, multitasking version for the future.

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