

## The Public Relations Role of the AOS Judge

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One of the standing committees of the American Orchid Society is the Public Relations Committee. This group is charged with furthering the public image of the Society - the "PR" men of the organization, if you will. Their charge is not exclusive, however, since every member of the American Orchid Society has a responsibility toward this end. In particular, the judges of the American Orchid Society, because of their greater public exposure, have a substantial responsibility in the field of public relations.

In defining "Duties and Responsibilities of Judges," the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition states, "It is a judge's responsibility at all times to act in a manner that will raise and maintain the standards of American Orchid Society Judging on the highest level, and at all times, by word and deed, reflect credit upon American Orchid Society Judging and himself." Use of the word Judging is perhaps overly restrictive in this statement, for in fact, the judge must reflect credit upon the American Orchid Society as well as American Orchid Society Judging.

American Orchid Society Judges comprise the largest group of individuals acting on behalf of the Society. Consequently, no other group has as much influence on the public image of the Society. More often than not, even the casual comments of a judge are interpreted as official pronouncements. Obviously then, like it or not, every judge must realize that he or she is a personal representative of the American Orchid Society.

Participation in AOS judged shows represents the area of greatest public contact. The judge is often operating outside his own region, with strangers, novice exhibitors and local society people in a position to observe his actions. Since the whole atmosphere

Of a show is often charged with the excitement of the occasion, emotions run at a high pitch and what may be a mundane situation to an experienced judge may be crucial to an exhibitor. It is so very easy to deliver a crushing blow with an ill-advised casual comment. Under the circumstances, a judge must carefully consider how his decisions, opinions, and comments may be interpreted, or misinterpreted, as the case may be.

It is not necessary for a judge to justify his decisions. The fact the he is a judge, an acknowledged expert, is sufficient justification. He is, however, obligated to explain his decisions. He must realize that many of the people to whom he will speak know very little about the judging function. These are the very people, however, who must be encouraged

to continue exhibiting and working with their local societies. These are the very people who, in time, will supply the judges of the future. To these people, a judge should provide encouragement through constructive, well-phrased criticism and comments.

A thorough working knowledge of the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition is an absolute requirement for all judges. Herein lie the rules and regulations, compiled for judges by judges, that provide national uniformity for the judging function. In the interim between handbook revisions the Committee on Awards issues regulations covering various aspects of judging which should also be committed to memory. New regulations are published from time to time in the Awards Quarterly and it is an absolute "must" that all judges subscribe to this publication.

Unfortunately, all of the facts in the world will not guarantee an absolutely amiable relationship among people. Controversial issues are at times unavoidable. However, the show arena during the show or the hospitality room after the show is not the place to discuss such problems. Persons not involved in judging do not have the background to interpret comments on controversial issues. There is an established procedure, through Regional Judging Committees to the Committee on Awards, for resolving controversial issues and establishing new procedures - use it! Open conflict destroys confidence in the judging system and hence in the American Orchid Society itself.

Remember that it is through the American Orchid Society that all of our coordinated efforts are effective in promoting the field of orchidology. Make a concerted effort to promote the Society whenever possible. Make it a point never to leave a show without reminding someone of the fact that without the AOS organization of a show as we know it would not be possible. Encourage every non-member to join the AOS. (Surprisingly, many orchid hobbyists are not AOS members.) Last but not least, do not ever become so preoccupied with the mechanics of judging that you forget your role in public relations as a personal representative of the American Orchid Society.