

## The Florida-Caribbean Region's Student Judge Training Program

By Claire Jill Sidran

Published in Awards Quarterly Vol. 14, No. 4, 1983, pages 188-189

In November of 1980 I was asked by Bob Scully, Jr., who was then Chairman of the Florida-Caribbean Region, to be the new Director of the Student Judge Training Program for our region, effective January 1981. At that time the Florida-Caribbean Region included the whole state of Florida. Therefore, I worked very closely with the judges at the Supplemental Center located in Tampa, especially Alan King. As of January 1983, that center officially became the Florida North Center, with its Training Program headed by Alan King.

At our Region's business meeting this spring, we formally adopted the following requirements for our region. 1. Attend two seminars a year. 2. Exhibit in two orchid shows a year. 3. Complete a paper within two years. 4. Take and pass a yearly written test. 5. Judge a minimum of six regional meetings. 6. Judge at a minimum of four AOS shows. Some of these requirements had evolved throughout the years, others, like the minimum judging requirements, were changed. I realized when discussing a student's judging attendance that the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, Seventh Edition, has no minimum judging requirements for students. Apparently this requirement is left to the individual regions.

One of my first responsibilities as Director of Student Judge Training was to conduct seminar arranged by the previous Director. That seminar was held in a hotel, with lunch provided by the hotel. This arrangement was quite expensive, with the incurred expense of rental of the room plus food, and the cost per person was approximately \$25. Our seminars are now held at Florida International University, since Dr. Malcolm Gotterer, a South Florida Orchid Society Judge, is able to obtain at no charge the use of a lecture hall for our seminars. Thus, we now only charge a minimum fee to defray any cost of providing snack food.

Although seminar attendance is required of Student, Probationary and Accredited Judges, we also invite anyone interested in judging, or anyone in the general public, to attend, through announcements at local orchid society meetings. We hold two seminars a year. They start at 9 a.m. and finish at 3 p.m., the latter time depending upon the amount of discussion. Some of the content of the presentations is geared to the annual tests. As an example, at our last seminar one of the programs combined an Accredited, Probationary and Student Judge showing slides of famous clones of unifoliate *Cattleya* species. They

discussed the characteristics of these species in and out of bloom, and their use in hybridization. We were fortunate to be able to view the slides from the collections of Tom Fennell, Marianne Ploch and Drago Strahija.

The format of our seminars has also included, for the benefit of our "newest" Student Judges, short, 5-10 minute presentations by them. Their talks usually include slides, and may cover an article from the Awards Quarterly or the American Orchid Society Bulletin, or excerpts from their student papers. These short talks provide the student with an opportunity to be in front of a group and to then field any questions.

Another format includes a short presentation by an Accredited Judge on "How to Judge" a particular group like Phalaenopsis, followed by the students joining different teams for discussion, and then the students scoring individual plants. This seems to be well received and provides a more relaxed atmosphere than at formal judging.

In scheduling our seminars we have an additional consideration as some of our judges live outside the continental United States. Therefore, once a year I try to schedule a seminar following AOS Florida-Caribbean Regional Judging, and coinciding with two AOS-judged orchid shows. All this occurs within a five-day period in April.

Perhaps a unique requirement for the Student Judges in our region is having them set up two exhibits in orchid shows each year. These exhibits must be a minimum of 25 square feet, can be done with one other student, or the requirement can be partially fulfilled by being in charge of the exhibit of a local orchid society. This has always been a requirement in this region. Since Florida has many orchid shows throughout the year with extensive exhibit judging, this requirement enables the students to have the experience necessary to properly evaluate and recognize the hard work and beauty of an exhibit "well done" - as well as to see the flaws and faults in others.

The concept of Student Judge papers was first implemented by Warren Kelly, who was then Director of Student Judge Training. As an example of the type of paper required, my subject was the genus *Aërides*. The paper was to be completed in one year and dealt with the history of the different species, their awards and use in hybridization. As much as I complained about writing this "epic novel" (it had 74 pages), the knowledge gained was invaluable. The paper was even more expensive than the cost of having it typed, as I became hooked on growing *aërides*, purchased most of the species - and worse - made hybrids!

The papers are critiqued by an Accredited Judge who is especially knowledgeable in the subject matter. After the papers are reviewed, they are either accepted or sometimes the students are requested to rewrite certain sections. I have changed the requirement a little by having the students complete in their first year the first section of the paper, on the

history of the species, and the hybridization section the following year. The topics for the papers are now more delineated and not as broad. One of the problems with the papers has been how to disseminate them. We would like to make them available to judges within and outside our region, as the papers are extremely valuable as reference materials.

In this region we have tests to evaluate the general knowledge of our prospective students, followed by an interview conducted by Accredited Judges. The prospective Student Judges also take a color perception test. This first test includes slides of representative species of the major alliances, e.g., Vanda - Vanda coerulea. The written test deals with an assessment of basic knowledge as well as specific information on a genus. Example: Name the three leaf types of the genus Vanda and name two species representing each leaf type.

During the course of the next three to five years, the then accepted Student Judges are given general-knowledge exams. When writing the first tests I realized that the type of test for three years of a general knowledge did not allow me to determine their growth and depth of knowledge. Thus, now our tests include one on the Cattleya alliance, the vandaceous alliance, and a third test, "Other," I am still unsure how to include the rest of the alliances as "Other." One recent suggestion might lead to take-home exams on specific alliances.

The students are also tested yearly on the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition. I changed this test so that the students are only tested on one-half of the Handbook each year. However, certain questions are included yearly, especially those dealing with any changes in the Handbook, like the recent change of the CBM award to CBR and CHM.

About two years ago, Bob Scully, Jr. and I devised a test that asks the Student Judges more hypothetical questions that they might encounter in actual judging situations. Additionally, part of the test involves them scoring an orchid, and giving an explanation for granting or not granting it an award, followed by a written description of the flower. This test is given to students who are eligible for elevation to Probationary Judge status. The part of the exam involving the scoring of the plant is not graded but evaluated as to how the student arrived at the award, not the actual score. Since we all have trouble with written descriptions, it is very important to find out if the student is capable in this area.

At the beginning of our monthly regional judgments, our students are expected to write down the names of any plants they would nominate, and give this list to me prior to the actual nominations by the judges. I don't grade these nominations, I just see if they concur with the decisions of the judges, as I feel that sometimes the students may have correctly nominated a plant that was overlooked and not awarded.

Our monthly AOS regional judging meetings are held separately from any local orchid club meeting, therefore, the people who have brought in any plants for judging wait in an

adjoining room for the judging to finish. As I used to be one of the "bringers and waiters," I have tried to include short mini-programs for their benefit, either during or after AOS judging. These programs have included the presentation by students of AOS slides of recently awarded plants. If an awarded orchid is especially unusual or interesting, the students look up additional information and present it. Sometimes these presentations have to be shelved if there are large numbers of plants brought in for judging.

Our Regional Chairman, Bill Merritt, also selects a team of judges for judging plants in front of the audience. After all of the plants have been nominated and judging has commenced in the other room, the Chairman selects a few judges to discuss the remaining plants. After judging has finished, a member of the team that awarded a plant presents the awarded plant to the audience.

Every time we begin to receive applications from prospective Student Judges, I am reminded of the diversity of the backgrounds of the people applying. The question remains, "How to teach the Student Judges all aspects of judging with such a short time as 3-5 years?" This diversity is important because it enriches our judging community. In my own experience, my interest and love of growing orchids started at an early age, in junior high school in Los Angeles, and has included a formal education encompassing a Bachelor of Science in Floriculture and Horticulture, and a PhD in Microbiology. As a newly Accredited Judge, I am still aware of how much more there is to learn and see, I still feel the need, and I think I will always ask the opinions of more experienced judges or hybridizers who may have more knowledge with a particular species or genus.

In order to answer some of these questions, I have asked for the opinions of judges in our own region as well as "picked the brains" of training directors and judges when traveling to other areas. Student Judges from other regions have also provided information and opinions. Bill Merritt, our Chairman, gave me a letter from Janet Travis of Mansfield State College, then an AOS Student Judge. She discussed at length the problems of diversity of student background, kinds of tests, and time and structure. All of these ideas helped me implement and add to our student program. I have come to the conclusion that given the astonishingly varied backgrounds of the applying students, and the limited amount of time involved, that our program must be structured. Some students may need more time than is currently allowed to complete the program. The clerkship program, as provided in the Pacific South Judging Region (Los Angeles) may be an answer to this problem.

Another question that still remains unanswered is, "What should an Accredited Judge be required to know?" Should we be "all-arounders" capable of judging in all alliances, much like a Best in Show dog judge, judging all breeds? Or should there be experts in each field? Certainly my expertise is more within the vandaceous alliance, as this is the area where I do the majority of my collecting and hybridizing. What is the answer? Perhaps if many

Accredited Judges submitted what they would expect a Student Judge to know about their field, e.g., unifoliate cattleyas, then we could put all of this information together in an instructional handbook at the national level and have the students learn from it. This could be in an outline form and list the basic knowledge to be attained before the student is elevated to probationary status. This would not be an attempt to standardize the regions, just to provide a guideline for the students as well as the training director in their overall program. Ernest Hetherington wrote recently (*Awards Quarterly* 14-3, 1983) about the great number of changes and trends that occur in hybridizing. Certainly we must be sure in any student training program to allow for growth and change. Perhaps one answer to the question about the knowledge of Accredited Judges would be, to have as an overall aim, that the judge should have expertise within an alliance but be conversant and knowledgeable enough in other areas, thus enabling him or her to recognize excellence in another genera.

I would welcome any comments or suggestions about the Florida-Caribbean Student Training Program, or any comments in general about such programs.