

The planning meeting was called to order Saturday morning at 8:45 am by President Brad Freeman.

### **Present**

Board members present were Brad Freeman, Mark Oldenkamp, Terry Schroeder, Allie Richards, Jess Becker, Linda DeRooy Holmes-Cook, Dan Baulig, Mel Epstein, Bob Schroeder, Elva Sellens, Rosemary Freeman, Debbie Pavich, Larry Smith, Marilyn Walton, Sharon Swaney, and guests, Rob Swaney, Bob Chibante, Wayne Shantz, Eleanor Shantz, Linda Taylor, Misty Florez, Steve Lamb, Ken Walton, Wayne Lobaugh, Karen Sanchez.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Brad gave an introduction providing information on what we would be covering during the planning meeting. We typically have regular, ongoing business that needs to be taken care of, we will have some informational presentations and plan for the future. We have some immediate needs that we need to address, which we hope to do in this meeting and the remainder of the board meeting on Sunday.

Brad discussed how the ADS is doing after Covid-19. We are doing good but could be doing better. We need to move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have some financial challenges; we are running at deficits from year to year. We are close to breaking even with the dues and *Bulletin* but there are other things that are running at a deficit. Lack of communication is a huge issue. There is a definite problem with getting information to people who need it in a timely manner. We receive a lot of new ideas about what the ADS can or should do. We need to set priorities and determine if we need some outside help. We have had a huge influx of new members. Many of those new members are not interested in exhibiting dahlias. We need to determine how to address the interest of all dahlia enthusiasts. Are we going to address the interest of the commercial/cut flower persons? We need to be aware of diversity. In the last couple of years, we have discovered Zoom for meetings throughout the country and world. There are also ways to streamline our operations and make it more efficient. This would help to save time for our volunteers and would have a financial impact. Some examples are trial garden, seedling bench, memberships, insurance, payments. You type in your information, and it's saved in a database where it can be accessed by those who need to access it. There will be discussion on the *Bulletin* later; we have been discussing changes for years and we need to decide what we are going to do with it. There will be discussion regarding number of bulletins, size (magazine vs book), content, digital vs print.

### **Membership Survey**

Brad reported the membership survey provided some good responses. The survey was a bit longer than he wanted but we needed to get the information. The questions were grouped by certain areas that needed to be looked at. Invitation to the complete the survey was sent to members by email; we received 471 responses. Jerry Moreno, Dahlia Society of Ohio, and a retired statistician provided information on how to put the information together. Ron Miner, Linda DeRooy Holmes-Cook, Tony Evangelista, and

Sharon Swaney were tasked with sorting through the pages of comments from the open-ended questions and make presentations today. He provided charts showing the demographics of those who completed the survey: where they live, number of years a member of the ADS, aspect of dahlia growing you would like to learn more about.

### **Why I Joined the ADS and Comments/Suggestions for the ADS Board**

Tony Evangelista presented the information on these two questions. The number one reason for joining the ADS was information/education followed by exhibiting dahlias and camaraderie. Some joined because they wanted to support and others because it was bundled with their local society. As far as suggestions for the board, there were 194 responses. About 25% of the responses said thank you or the board is doing a good/great job. The other top responses were for information on cut flowers, development of future leaders, serious vs. casual growers. Some responses included intentional communication between the board and ADS Reps and local presidents. List of speaker's board with list of topics they can do a good presentation. Website standards for local societies, videos done by ADS members, more technology resources were also comments made by members.

### **Research**

Brad Freeman reported on the virus and genome research projects. The important thing is cultural practices, soil treatment and then disease and pests. There is no scientific data to back up the amount of water, fertilizer, sunlight, etc. Most of the comments are positive about both the virus and genome projects. Comments reflected communication (lack of awareness), unrealistic expectations from the genome project, request for at-home testing and treatment.

Under general garden cultural practices comments included plant spacing, climate effects, hybridizers for specific form and color, tuber size and storage and taking successful cuttings. These are amenable to local society discussions, presentations, and mentor relationships.

Under soil treatments comments included optimal Ph, best watering, most effective fertilization by soil type, till vs no till, year to year and decade to decade changes, mulching practices. WSU is a land grant college, so their focus is on agriculture and there are land grant colleges across the United States. The endowment at WSU was made with an agreement to use some of the endowment for a dahlia resource center where scientific research was gleaned from across WSU and other places and made available to others on these kinds of topics. It hasn't happened although there has been some momentum in that direction. The virus group continues to work toward making that happen.

Under disease/pest control comments included organic control methods, dahlia gall. Many of these questions can be dealt with at the local society level. We should provide the information via the website so it can be accessed by the local societies and members.

Under cut flowers comments included extending cut flower life. There may be information available; we just need to find it and make it available.

There was a question about Why do some cultivars disappear over time. There are just certain varieties that are hard to keep; some can only be kept by doing cuttings or pot

tubers. There was a comment regarding the integration of ordinary gardeners and the cut flower people. There's a commonality of the dahlia, how to raise the dahlia, what are our practices.

### **Website**

Sharon Swaney provided some website statistics. We have about 3,800 users/month, 11,000 page views but a lot of them bounce so about 6,500 are people getting what they want. The majority of our traffic is US, Canada, and England. We are over half mobile users, mostly phones. The top places people are looking at is OCG, container gardening, Dahlia University.

### **How Often do you Visit the Site**

Two visit daily, one being Sharon and most visit occasionally. We don't have many hard-core users.

### **Overall Opinion of the Website**

Over 80% said good or excellent. Some said average and some said no opinion. The number of those with no opinion correlated with the number who never go to the website.

### **What do you Find Most Interesting or Helpful**

Twenty-five percent named the OCG as the most interesting/helpful. Many people said lots of information, good growing information. The Dahlia U got some positive comments. Many people indicate they like the current information and news. A lot of people like the awards to blooms. Many people said it was easy to use. The photo contest was positive, and people liked the people's choice portion of the photo contest. People want more local society input and more information about what local societies are doing. They want to know what other societies do at shows. Sharon states she isn't sure how to fix this because she can't get information from societies (about 40%) about their tuber sales. She feels it is important for us to figure out how to get the connection between local societies and the website. They like the archive of the *Bulletin* and the search option. Consistent across the board is people like the pictures and want more of them.

Many people said the navigation is cumbersome; this will be one of Sharon's priorities. Jess said she will work with Sharon to determine what is the best solution. Some people said they wanted a design upgrade and several hate pink but that's the color of the logo, so choices are limited. Member's section is confusing to people. We now have a picture of the sign-on page so people can see what it should look like. Some people don't like that we have a member's section, and some don't understand why we have a member's section, but Sharon feels it is necessary. They were confused by the single user sign on of "member." If we went to individual user sign on, we would need someone that maintains the individual passwords. You need to verify that each user creating a user sign on is indeed a member. There were several comments about wanting more streamlined writing on the website. It's really important to get people's attention at the beginning of an article on the website.

### **What Improvements Would You Make**

Growing information, more about local societies, dahlia terms, a youth section. People are asking for the entire CHG to be downloadable. Pictures of seedling bench entries were requested. Information about showing, staging, and judging information. Profiles of hybridizers were requested. People were interested in finding where public gardens are located so that people can look at dahlias in an area where they are going on vacation. They would like to have “swagger” items in the store, such as license plate holders that say I Love Dahlias, etc. Tips on how to use the website; she is happy to do so via zoom for any society that would be interested in a program on that. Several wanted more information on awards to blooms and information about how to photograph dahlias. People wanted a list of dahlias that are heat-tolerant, and some wanted information on the height. There were some interested in information about starting a trial garden.

Sharon thinks we should provide some information on the results of the survey on the website.

### **How Can You Help**

Pictures, pictures, pictures! Pictures of people having fun, people in the garden, societies, and individual flowers. Please proof information before sending it and think about short sentences, short paragraphs, and bullet points. Remember, you have about eight seconds to attract people’s attention on the website. More videos, not necessarily something you’ve done but something you find that is useful.

### **Concerns Going Forward**

Sharon states she is about at the limit at what she can do. She spends a lot of time and can’t do much more on her own. She needs a design expert as that is not her area of expertise. Some have suggested a big “hero” picture on the page. Remember this needs to be a picture that tells you something about the ADS; it needs to be something special that will evoke an emotion in the person. We need to balance how much money, time, and energy we put into the website. We really need lots of good articles on growing. We should thank the respondents and summarize the responses of the survey. There should be a committee to assist Sharon with the website as well as all of the committee chairs. Our committee chairs tend to act alone when there should be others involved.

### **Bulletin**

Linda DeRooy Holmes-Cook provided information on what is most interesting/helpful and improvements to the *Bulletin*.

### **Most interesting/Helpful**

Over 65% said dahlia culture is most important; people want to know how to grow dahlias, they want people’s hints, pictures. Some of the things they liked were organic gardening, hybridization, Tuber Talk, CHD, articles from hybridizers, share secrets for success, cream of the crop/fab 50, seedling bench and trial garden scores, photos. ADS business, memorials, show reports were important. Many indicated they would like to understand the scores or rationale for something winning from the seedling bench and trial garden. She has put more photos in the *Bulletin* recently which has been positive. Members love to hear from the experts. There is some support for a digital-only format, due to mailing cost, environment (killing trees), time lag so information is timelier. Club reports are appreciated; would be helpful to have clear information on city and state

where the club is located. There are mixed reviews about the show reports; some want them online and others don't understand the award breakdowns. Exhibitors want to know what dahlias do best in exhibition. The *Bulletin* has something for everyone. Members like to see the vendors/advertisers including tools we use in our garden. They appreciate first-person reports on successes, articles on pest control, soil, science, genetics, and virus. They want to know the best dahlia choices in their area. Many appreciate a little humor. All want to understand the dahlia terminology and information from the "dahlia heavyweights."

## **Improvements**

Members want a clearer format with distinct sections. They would like a more professional layout and a more friendly font. Members feel the book is hard to handle. There should be more proof reading; Linda has three proofreaders: Larry Smith, Donna Lane, and Debbie Pavich. Relevance of content is dependent on timely delivery; Linda's goal is to always have the *Bulletin* in members' homes the first week of the month of issue. Members want information on the seedling bench and trial gardens. They want to know how dahlias are judged and what the different terms mean. A glossary might be useful. Members want to know what makes a winning dahlia; use examples to illustrate concepts. Mentors are an important model to share information with new members. More pictures, more color, more education. Diagrams for staking, pest and disease control, hybridization. It was suggested to have one article per issue on cultivation. There were some who felt the size could be larger, so it was more like a magazine. Identify and say something about the authors including contact information, email, or URLs. Question and answer format is easy to follow. Increase member visibility. Include a feature designed to draw in new readers. More human-interest stories; highlight new members as well as veterans. Sections for the beginner grower, for children/teens would be helpful. It is important to remember dahlias are not just for exhibitors; we need to be relevant to all members.

## **Bulletin Plan**

Brad presented his plan for the future of the *Bulletin*. Perhaps go to printing the *Bulletin* three times per year. Brad's thoughts were to have a winter Bulletin in January, a spring Bulletin in June and a fall Bulletin in October. This timeline is suggested as the Bulletin not getting printed on time and there is a surcharge on mailings in December. There are struggles to complete the seedling bench evaluation and trial garden reports and the CHD in time for the December Bulletin. We need a June Bulletin as several items are required to be in the June Bulletin. We can keep the current size of 5.5 x 8.5 or use a magazine-style format, 8.5 X 11 for about half the cost. We can also look at the option of digital vs print. Based on the survey results, Brad thinks about half would opt for print and half for digital. There are several options as to how a digital magazine can be done. If we opt for both digital and print, it would be important to have both versions delivered simultaneously.

Currently, the design and layout of the Bulletin is not in our control. Linda checks the layout and proofs the material, but the printer does the layout and design. We would need to pay someone to do the layout as it would take 40 to 50 hours three or four times/year. We are currently scanning the Bulletin to put it on the website; the person who does the layout and design would provide a PDF that could be placed on the

website. We need to determine what articles will be in the Bulletin and what will be on the website. Information that is important to members such as the seedling bench evaluation and trial garden reports need to be on the website so that it is delivered in a timely manner. It would be nice to have regular columns in the Bulletin, ADS information and other information relevant to ADS members. We need to decide how we want to improve the Bulletin; we have been discussing this for many years. We can think of the Bulletin not just as an expense but as a sales tool that will help to retain memberships. This will be a big transition. Step one would be going to three bulletins per year. Over 2023, we transition to the style of the Bulletin and figure out the details.

Perhaps we could do some emails to members through Constant Contact to provide statistical/report information that is timely. The ADS needs to have a brand that is used on the website and in all publications so that people know what organization it belongs to immediately.

### **Update of the ADS Plan for the Future 2022 Five Year Plan**

#### **Vision Statement**

To be an organization that serves all type of dahlia growers from the home gardener who just grows a few dahlias to the enthusiast who grows dahlias to exhibit and/or hybridize.

#### **Mission Statement**

The American Dahlia Society is organized to promote and encourage the development and appreciation of the dahlia through educational and research activities and by supporting the local dahlia societies.

#### **Goals**

- Promote the dahlia as a garden flower as well as a flower to be exhibited at shows and fairs.
- Increase implementation of programs that appeal to the various dahlia interests including home gardeners, commercial growers, and the gardening retailers.
- Increase and improve the effectiveness of ADS support to the local dahlia societies especially to those societies that are just starting out or are in distress. Provide them the tools for success; use of technology to assist. Increase communication to local societies.
- Broaden the scope of the dahlia research that ADS supports to include several aspects of raising dahlias, coordination to existing resources, WSU Center.
- Continue ADS support for the judging, exhibiting and the introduction of new varieties of dahlias.
- Increase the visibility of the ADS to the general public especially those interested in gardening, cut flowers, commercial growing, florists.
- Increase the number and improve the quality of ADS publications with the availability of digital resources on all aspects of dahlia culture and make them available to both members of the ADS and the general public.
- Improve the financial condition of the ADS.

## Action Items

- ADS logo – create a brand, update logo. How does it fit with the digital platform?
- Update the handbook for ADS representatives
- Revise the bylaws to make the local ADS representatives outreach officials of the ADS – completed
- ADS publication for new growers – use the PSDA “A Monthly Guide” – completed
- Improve the monthly communication to the ADS representatives – schedule of due dates for ADS activities including ADS rep timelines.
- Garden dahlia information – put DVD information into a digital format
- Topical editors for the Bulletin – use of more regular contributors
- For a committee to prepare a plan on what improvements should be made to the ADS Bulletin, such as adding colors, timely delivery, format, etc. and how to achieve those improvements – make progress in 2022-2023.
- Prepare handbook for starting a new dahlia society – send to existing societies as requested.
- Continue to upgrade to the current ADS website.
- Start a committee to determine how to raise money for “big ticket” items. A couple of ideas are to have a national online tuber auction (needs someone to organize and do it), seminars with registration fees which can be done online through zoom at a reasonable cost.
- Prepare a brochure and/or video describing all the benefits of membership in the ADS that the local societies can use at events to gain membership for both the local society and the ADS – a PowerPoint or brochure/template online that could be downloaded and used at events.
- Prepare a DVD on judging information for all levels – training modules in development that will be available online in 2022.
- Public relations resource available – local societies can use the ADS publicity chair as a resource to get information to the media.

## Virus Project

Linda Taylor presented information on the virus project with Dr. Hannu Pappu. There are some exciting new developments and accomplishments.

- Clean between initiative is working; disinfecting tools between plants is becoming a common practice. About two-thirds of the ADS survey respondents said they were now cleaning between.
- Upcoming publications
  - Photo guide to virus symptoms – we have six years of photos connected to test results.
  - Guide to virus vs. non-virus symptoms – it's important to know the difference as there a lot of other things that can affect dahlias.
  - University of North Carolina produced a video, available on YouTube about dahlia nutrient issues.
- Can track individual viruses and their test results and the symptoms. We are coming to some conclusions about the differences between the viruses.
- Clean Dahlia Center at WSU – they have taken meristem tip cuttings from dahlias with virus and growing them via tissue culture into mature plants which

have tested clean of virus and produced tubers. There is still a long way to go with this process.

- Virus testing is the backbone of the program. Without testing you can't tell if it works. This is a collaboration between the researchers at WSU and members of the ADS. Our data is connected to specific viruses. There is no list of virus-resistant dahlias. There is a unique collection of documented data, photos, and observations.
- Tracking and repeated testing of selected stock over the years to see how much each virus persists from one year to the next; there seems to be some variation.
- Tracking the ADS class, form, and year of origination looking for any patterns that show up for infection and resistance.
- Need wider testing to validate or challenge the theories and assumptions that are found. Are looking for any new symptoms and patterns.
- Virus testing is needed to increase the availability of clean stock. Stock that is tested clean can be used for propagation and sales in 2023. In Ohio tubers that have tested clean are commanding premium prices at tuber auctions and sales.
- Vendor testing is free and confidential for up to 30 samples.
- Photos of samples and plants tested are needed and encouraged.
- Behaviors of Dahlia Virus – we are finding out that they do not have persist from one year to the next.
  - Tobacco streak is often asymptomatic
  - Impatiens necrotic spot virus does not seem to persist from one year to the next.
  - Cucumber mosaic virus – we have found almost none; do we need to continue testing for this virus?
  - Dahlia mosaic virus and dahlia common mosaic virus
  - Dr. Pappu is working with a testing facility to develop a rapid test for dahlia mosaic virus.
  - There are still plants are testing clean
- Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus
  - Obvious symptoms, often localized
  - May be possible to just remove the symptomatic portions but still testing to determine if this is possible.
- Clean Dahlia Center at WSU for production of clean stock from diseased stock. In 2021 the first plants were grown from meristem tissue culture. Source plants mostly had virus, but all the resulting plants have repeatedly tested virus free. Clean stock used for propagation and maintained and grown in controlled conditions to keep it clean, on 20 cultivars to see what the practical aspects are of producing clean stock.
- Genome sequencing will help in defenses against pests, diseases and identify virus sequences. The sequencing will compare the genetics of older varieties with recent varieties.

## Genome Sequencing

Dr. Alex Harkess introduced himself. He is a professor at Auburn University and is joint as faculty investigator at a biotechnology institute, Hudson Alfa in Huntsville, Alabama. He is an evolutionary biologist, loves genetics and putting complicated plant genomes



together. He is working with Zach Mehog, a PhD student and presented information on which Zach has been working.

Zach's dissertation project is addressing three questions in the field of evolutionary biology. They are: 1) What is the relationship of all species in the dahlia genus. 2) What is the evolutionary parentage of the modern cultivated dahlia. 3) what genes correlate with diverse traits.

### Relationship of Species in the Dahlia Genus

What is the dahlia species, how many are there and how are they related to each other? They started with sequencing one or two genes but found that did not work well. Without a good understanding of how species are related you cannot really answer how dahlias evolved over time and what are the parents. We can now sequence thousands of genes which gives good information as to how species are related. In the early 2000's, we built species trees/relationships on one tree and now we can do it on thousands. The issue with dahlias is that dahlia genomes can be huge and expensive to sequence. Humans are diploid, meaning you get one copy of our chromosomes from mom and dad. Dahlias are octoploid, getting four copies of chromosomes from mom and dad. We don't have a reference genome for any dahlia species. Dr. Harkess described the process of sequencing about 1,000 genes to develop a dahlia tree of life. They are doing a multi-prong approach, taking samples from as many dead (herbaria) and live plants as possible. It is, however, difficult to get living plant material from Mexico so herbaria have been a good way of getting some of that material. He is working on getting as much diverse material as possible.

### Parents of the Modern Octoploid Cultivars

There is not beautiful set of species relationships, but we do have some. It does give us an idea of what could be some of the punitive parents. Plants can duplicate their genomes; we don't know what kind of duplication occurred. There are two types of duplication. They can double their own genomes which is called an auto polyploidy event. Another way plants can double genomes by hybridizing between two species, adding the chromosomes together which is called an allod polyploidy event. We don't know what kinds of duplication events happened that led to this increase in chromosome number in genome size in the cultivated octoploids. There are some hypotheses that have been formed and they will be testing those. They have been collecting leaf tissues from the five different species that Kristine Albrecht sent to Marcie Holt in Georgia to grow. They generated genome sequencing data on them. An important question is the evolutionary history of polyploidy (genome duplication) in dahlias. This is a critical question as we need to know how these genomes have doubled because it affects how they approach the sequencing project. We have whole genome sequencing data for five species of dahlias now.

### What Genes Control Diverse Traits

They are pushing forward by generating a high-quality reference genome for an octoploid dahlia, probably an Edna C; they also have some Thomas Edison data they can do as well. They collected pictures and leaf samples from about 1,000 dahlias at the 2021 national dahlia show. They have a diversity of phenotypes including forms, color, shapes, sizes, etc. Zach can extract DNA from each of those leaves. The

octoploid genome is not as complicated as they had thought; it is not eight separate genomes, which makes the genome assembly easier. Our goal is to put together a perfect octoploid dahlia reference genome and collect phenotypes on as many dahlias as possible and sequence their DNA. He is hoping three to six months they will have progress on genome sequencing for an octoploid dahlia individual.

### **Judges Training**

Bob Schroeder presented information on the rewrite of the *Guide to Judging Dahlias*. The goal is to have the new judging guide available in June. He provided a history of the judging manual which first came out in 1953, revised in 2002 and now in 2022. The committee was consisted of experienced senior judges from across the US and Canada. They met regularly from September 2020 to the present. Goals of the committee was 1) to organize the manual to make it more user friendly; 2) update the language and terminology; 3) reduced the ambiguity by using consistent terminology; 4) agreement between the *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias* (CHD) and the *Guide to Judging Dahlias*. The new manual will have color photographs and will be easier to read.

Bob presented information about the curriculum committee which was formed to develop a curriculum for judges training. The goals were to 1) develop a training curriculum for each of the judging levels; 2) establish a baseline for training across societies and provide a more consistent training standard. The curriculum is a recommended set of guidelines to help support current training offered by societies but not to replace current training. It may be used to augment existing training and can be updated as needed. Again, the committee consisted of senior judges from across the US and Canada. The committee developed a base curriculum for each level of judges, candidate, accredited and senior. They now are in the process of developing online modules that cover all characteristics of judging dahlias. There will be thirteen modules that will be available.

Laura showed one of the completed modules on fully double form. Since there is a lot of information to be covered in form, it was divided into three modules, fully double form, open-centered form and how to judge form. Laura presented the module on fully double form. There will be 15 slides that will be placed on the ADS website and can be downloaded by instructors, individuals, or local societies.

**The meeting was adjourned at 4:04 pm.**

Respectively Submitted,

Terry Schroeder

ADS General Secretary