

A history of the Midwest Hosta Society and its Newsletter

By Bob Olson

Ready for a boring history lesson? Well think again, especially considering the presenter. Dr. Bob Olson was the original editor of the *Hosta Leaves* and served in that position for 14 years during the society's formative years. The first issue of the *Hosta Leaves* appeared in 1977 - long before the advent of email, texting and cell phones. At that time the role of a society newsletter was to promote member networking and the sharing of group information. That was particularly important in those early days.

Being an editor can sometimes be a lonely job. Trying to recruit other writers is a constant challenge. As a result, a number of nom de plume writers emerged on the MRHS scene: Rollie Dahle, Ed Dantes, Art Dimmesdale and Allison Crossley. Most famous though was Axel Troedsson who to this day remains a lifetime member of the AHS (compliments of Herb Benedict). Of course you will never meet any of these fine authors. All are simply the product of an overactive imagination of the editor. They didn't create any less work for Bob, but alas he had plenty of company, even if only in his own mind.

As editor Bob would always be on the receiving end of membership responses to recent issues of the *Hosta Leaves*. Bob recalled a couple of rather humorous "Letters to the Editor". One letter from Julia Giesler inquired as to why Peter Ruh had registered one of her hostas for her posthumously. Another involved the classic tale of the origins of *Hosta* 'Craig's Temptation'.

One of the responsibilities of the newsletter editor was sending out annual renewal notices. Having tired of sending those notices out in great numbers every year, Bob presented a brilliant marketing proposal to the MRHS board - a new dues structure where one year was \$5 and 5 years was \$10. Nearly everyone member renewed for 5 years while membership grew to 456 members in those early days.

Bob spoke of the ever changing technology that goes with publishing a newsletter: from the days of typewriters, to digital typesetting; from the first issue with black and white pictures, to color pictures. In many of these advances the *Hosta Leaves* was actually out in front of the AHS *Hosta Journal*. Bob also bragged a bit about the *Hosta Leaves* breaking the news story on *Hosta Virus X* as a result of having Dr. Ben Lockhart as a speaker at the 1993 Winter Scientific Meeting.

And speaking of the Winter Scientific, it was first held in 1989 and has occurred each year since then. The first WSM was held in Mark Zilis' Greenhouse/Nursery; the second at a place called Danada House and the third at the Morton Arboretum. After that we started meeting at hotels with conference centers.

Bob also recalled some of the early MRHS "conventions". Actually they were more like "meetings" since there were no tour buses, no leaf shows, and no educational speakers back then. Meetings were held every other year so people could get together when there wasn't a national meeting (which was also held every other year). The 1981 Iowa City meeting was the third formal meeting of the organization. It was organized by Gretchen Harshbarger long before there was a local hosta society in Iowa. Besides the fellowship, the focus of the meeting was the garden tours - albeit relatively small gardens containing relatively small hosta collections in those days. The auction was held at a nearby Chinese restaurant where auctioneer Jim Cooper provided the "entertainment" for the 35 attendees. After enjoying a few libations at dinner (well maybe more than just a few) Jim proceeded to auction off *Hosta* 'Frilly Puckers'.

Try saying that five times in a row! In an act of desperation Jim made a quick bid and purchased the hosta himself.

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