

The Joy of Judging
Anita Moran

Okay I have only been an AIS judge for two years but before that I judged dogs, cattle, chickens, swine, sheep and a number of other animals. Believe it or not the principle is pretty much the same. The animals like irises are judged against themselves, how they are raised (condition when judged) and the standard set for the breed, species and subspecies. Still there is so much more to judging an iris show than choosing which is the best of the stalks presented and that came to the forefront when I was asked to judge an iris show for the Central Virginia Iris Society (CVIS) in Richmond Virginia.

Here was a club which had gone years without having an iris show and were now reorganizing under the leadership of their president John Rosini. Many of the members were new to the society or had not participated in shows previously. Knowing this John invited Lois Rose of the Fredericksburg Iris Society and is on the AIS exhibition committee, to give a class on grooming an iris for a show. Even though she had to use fake flowers, enough of the members she taught took her teachings from months earlier and put themselves and their irises out there for someone they did not know to judge them, their growing techniques, and their knowledge. That takes a lot of courage for all those who show their irises and these were the people who needed an AIS judge the most, not just to judge the stalks they bring but to remain after the show and answer the plethora of questions they have for one of the hardest things we do in life is allow others to judge us.

I will not name the exhibitors but I will say that as a group they tried extremely hard to put their best forward, seeming to bring every stalk from their garden even if it was on its last bloom and place it on the bench and worked hours to put their babies forward for us to see, even those they did not know the name of. Thankfully Ginny Spoon was the second judge and able to give some of the names of the unknowns and was great after the judging was complete. When the queen's table was chosen and the show opened to the public, Ginny and I stayed to answer questions any of those that exhibited had. Most wanted explanations why their stalk was judged as it had been judged and all were receptive to what was told to them and shown. The questions were wonderful and the people were all receptive to all the advice given to them. Being pulled from stalk to stalk did not matter and many of the exhibitors moved so that they could learn from each stalk, but we wanted to answer any questions they had.

It has been my experience that the overwhelming majority of people belonging to the AIS and the iris world whether they are judge, hybridizer, or just an enthusiast, are very giving of their knowledge and for the first time all those hours of training was wonderfully paid off in full. During conventions, regional meetings, shows, and garden visits there have so many who freely gave their information and advice. Don and Ginny Spoon has had to put up with me the most, but Rick Tasco, Keith Keppel and many others allowed me to question them on any number of subjects but I have always realized their time is important but the information they share is priceless. I can only hope I gave a little back for what I received.