

Efforts to Diversify and Bolster ASHS Membership

As we look forward to convening in San Diego later this year, we should all consider ways to recruit new members and re-engage past members who have stepped away from our society. The "lowest-hanging fruit" includes colleagues we know personally who, for whatever reason, have chosen not to get involved to date or have opted to attend only regional ASHS events. In many cases, simply approaching these individuals to share your own experiences—and highlighting what our society has provided you over the years—can spark enough interest for them to consider joining and enjoying the perks of membership.

Within your professional circle, you may also encounter colleagues who mistakenly believe ASHS isn't a good fit for them because they don't hold a terminal degree. Correcting this misconception requires that we reference many longtime ASHS participants from both industry and academia who regularly attend and present meaningful work, regardless of their level of formal education.

Furthermore, we would be remiss not to consider allied professionals. We must not only consider what they could gain from membership, but also what they can provide: unique training and skill sets that often differ from what we were exposed to in school or encounter in our workplace. Each of us is surrounded by professionals who choose different paths but remain closely linked to horticulture. Please consider reaching out to these individuals within your sphere of influence.

When encouraging others to join, we should emphasize that while our annual conference is a major highlight, ASHS also offers monthly activities and continuous opportunities to connect with like-minded professionals. Once potential candidates gain a deeper appreciation for what our society represents, they are likely to find that the investment of time and resources warrants a lifelong membership. Even in a conservative scenario, they may choose to renew their membership during years when the upcoming conference's content and location appeal to them. To that end, we should proudly highlight our stellar track record of hosting annual conferences rich in content and delivered in an array of geographically interesting and diverse locations—factors that may provide the added impetus needed for those reluctant to take the plunge.

On a personal note, I am already identifying groups from related disciplines that are geographically close enough to San Diego to give us a chance for recruiting them. Therefore, I will reach out to societies representing entomology, plant pathology, agricultural engineering, landscape architecture, arboriculture, etc.—especially those with regional chapters. Because their proximity to San Diego will mitigate travel expenses, they may be more likely to attend.

Ultimately, every ASHS member can contribute by welcoming new people aboard, whether as lifelong members or intermittent contributors. While our society has already done a great job in attracting people from many specialties, integrating additional new members from a multitude of disciplines will only make our society more diverse and resilient. I am reminded of a nugget of wisdom I received long ago from Dr. Jack Roberson of American Daylily and Perennials in Grain Valley, Missouri. Dr. Jack, a veterinarian turned daylily and lantana breeder, always espoused “all of us need each other”—a straightforward yet profound statement that perfectly captures our mission today.