Meet Me in Orlando – Part One

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As you can see from the title of this “Reflections”, this is a two-part communication concerning the 2020 Annual Conference (August 9-13, at the Rosen Plaza Hotel, Orlando, Florida). In Part One I will share some of my conference experiences, and how you can get involved. Next month, in Part Two, I will discuss something of the process of putting the conference together and more specifics about speakers, activities, and events at the 2020 Conference.

The ASHS Annual Conference has been important to me both personally and professionally, and I didn’t realize how important until some years later. I really had to be pushed to attend my first Conference, and my mentor, A.E. “Tommy” Thompson (former Department Head of Horticulture at Arizona and ASHS International Affairs Division Vice President from 1984 to 1985), did the pushing. My insecurities (I can admit them now) were: 1) this is a large conference (over 1,000 attendees) and how would I meet people (really I wanted to know if I would find anyone to eat dinner with or perhaps to have a beer), and 2) my research was just beginning, and would anyone be interested? As to my first concern, almost immediately the genetics, germplasm, and vegetable plant breeding groups welcomed me, and I still interact with many of these folks (both professionally and personally) today (I am still having a beer with some of these same people at the Annual Conference). As for my research, although “preliminary,” my new peers were at my presentations, asked questions, and made excellent suggestions (really enhancing the quality of my work). It turned out both of my fears were unfounded, and mainly because all of these individuals were at one time the new person, and they knew exactly what I was going through. I have since made it a point to go out of my way to welcome students, new members, and attendees at the Annual Conference, because I was once the new person.

I found it surprisingly easy to become involved in several Working Groups (today called Professional Interest Groups). I just attended oral presentations, gave presentations at sessions, and attended the Working Group meetings. This is a remarkably easy way to get to know people, and become involved. Before I knew it, I was actually in a leadership role in a couple of these groups. My first involvements were with the Genetics and Germplasm, Vegetable Breeding, and Teaching Methods Professional Interest Groups, all of which I am still active in today. Professional Interest Groups are collections of individuals with similar interests, and your first line of interaction in ASHS. Do not be bashful, if you have “any” interest in a Professional Interest Group, attend some sessions or the Professional Interest Group Business Meeting, you never know where this may lead.

Report your scholarship. For all attendees, there are two methods by which to convey your research results. Oral presentations are 15 minutes (12 minutes for the talk and 3 minutes for questions) and organized into sessions around Professional Interest Groups. Poster presentations are similarly organized, and the sessions are about 45 minutes. Find the guidelines for oral and
poster presentations at https://ashs.org/page/AbstractGuidelines. The deadline to submit abstracts is March 15, and if accepted you will receive notice around May 1. Abstracts are evaluated by a committee of ASHS members (to be discussed in Part Two of this missive). We want to hear what you are doing, and the committee is looking for scholarship completed at the time of submission. Statements like “data will be taken” are red flags for the committee. Oral presentations are a time for group discussion, but the time is limited (although many discussions continue in the hallway after the talks). Posters are an excellent way to present information, and gain much more one-on-one interaction. I have friends who look at every poster from a specific Professional Interest Group before the session, so that they have their questions and thoughts in mind before they meet the presenter.

There are also numerous competitions at the Annual Conference (https://ashs.org/page/Competitions). There is one competition for early career professionals, but most are for graduate and undergraduate students. Announcements of awards are at various venues, and some include cash prizes. For most of the competitions you must enter upon abstract submission; however, there are exceptions as noted below. Here is a list and a few words about each of the competitions. The Early Career Competition is for new faculty and professionals to communicate the impact of their extension, research, teaching, and other scholarly activities. Scholars Ignite are 3-minute lightening round-type of talks for graduate students to share their discoveries to a diverse, non-specialist audience. The Graduate Student Poster Competition is for Graduate Students presenting posters at the conference. Students gain experience in concisely presenting their results to interested faculty judges. The Controlled Environment Oral Competition is open to Graduate and Undergraduate Students whose research includes work in controlled environments. For Graduate and Undergraduate students giving oral presentations related to floriculture, there is the Floriculture Oral Competition. The Plant Growth Regulation Professional Interest Group is holding the Plant Growth Regulation Oral Competition for the best Graduate and Undergraduate Student oral presentations related to plant growth regulation. For the Undergraduate Oral and Poster Competitions, an undergraduate student is automatically included in the appropriate undergraduate competition when you submit your abstract in the online system.

I truly enjoy going to the ASHS Annual Conference. I certainly enjoy hearing about and discussing recent findings in areas in which I am interested or conducting research. Also, many of the problems we are researching are the same as those addressed by other Professional Interest Groups. Thus, I always go to at least one session outside of my expertise to see how others are addressing these problems. Often I just feel good that we are not alone, but sometimes I get ideas for new techniques or approaches to address these subjects. I also have made life-long friendships. We do not necessarily see each other every year, but when we do, it is just as if we saw each other last week. I encourage you to come to the 2020 Annual Conference, and meet me in Orlando!