Through the years, the ASHS Board of Directors and Headquarters staff have worked to provide relevant member benefits. Many different types of benefits have been explored and incorporated into ASHS. Some have survived the test of time, while others have not.

Professional Certification has been an important discussion in the society for well more than 20 years. The value of professional certification for our membership has been a topic of much discussion. Some members see a value to certification because it requires those certified to continue learning and thus maintain up-to-date knowledge of various horticultural practices. Others have argued that their PhD is all of the credentials they need because a higher education degree is more valuable than certification. Certainly both arguments have merit.

ASHS has two certification programs that members may utilize. This column provides information about the Certified Professional Horticulturist (CPH) and Associate Professional Horticulturist (APH) program. Next month I will discuss the Certified Horticulturist program, which was developed for a different level of horticulturists.

The CPH program was originally under the auspices of the American Society of Agronomy. In 2000, ASHS Past President J. Benton Storey and Mike Neff began discussions with ASA to move the program to ASHS. That transfer occurred later that year. This program is an education/experience-based program. A person who is interested in pursuing the Certified Professional Horticulturist certification must provide their academic record and work experience history for the CPH board members to review. There is a minimum standard that must be met, meaning that the applicant must have completed a minimum of a BS degree in Horticulture and have 5 years of work experience. For applicants with advanced degrees, the additional degree can be substituted for some of the work experience. People who have a degree that is similar to horticulture can apply, and their educational background will be considered based on basic courses that have been considered integral to the horticulture profession. The CPH committee works to identify courses and the number of credits within topic areas that are needed as minimum requirements to be eligible for certification.

The APH program is similar to the CPH, but it is for those who are working towards gaining the education and work experience to be fully certified as a CPH. So, one might say that the Associate Professional Horticulturist certification is a stepping stone towards the CPH.

The CPH/APH has no exam requirement. As long as an applicant can provide appropriate documentation of his/her education and work experience, he/she can be certified.

Certification is for a period of two years. During that two years, the CPH must complete 40 continuing education units (CEUs) to renew the certification. The CEUs can be acquired in several different ways. Probably the most common method is through participating in horticulture-related professional meetings (including ASHS national or regional conferences). One hour of classroom time at a
professional meeting is equal to one CEU. Other ways to gain CEUs are by self-directed study, community service, and authoring educational materials, including refereed manuscripts.

If an individual does not quite have the credentials needed for the CPH, he/she may apply for APH status. In this case, the certification is valid for a calendar year and must be renewed annually. There is a limit on how long one may be classified as an APH. The length of time depends on the background of the individual.