

## **President's Message: Past Presidents and Recurring Themes**

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## President's Message

### Past Presidents and Recurring Themes

I welcome this opportunity to address the membership of our society as your new president. For inspiration and guidance, I perused the “messages” of our most recent past presidents, Howie Neufeld (2006–2008), Conley McMullen (2008–2010), and Lytton Musselman (2010–2012). I met all three men through SABS and fondly regard them as my mentors for this position. Their presidential addresses varied in focus, but certain recurring themes require some commentary and update below, along with a sprinkling of some other past presidents.

#### *Whence I Came and Whither I Go!*

The former presidents reflected on when they first joined SABS, typically during their student days. I come from a different perspective: as new member in 2000, I had just relocated to the University of Georgia, my own student days (too) many years behind me. I knew about the society via *Castanea* and wanted to increase my professional contacts within the immediate botanical community of the southeastern United States. Plus, my predecessors in my new position as curator of the GA Herbarium were former SABS presidents Sam Jones (1970) and Wilbur Duncan (1976)!

Just four years ago, I was encouraged to attend my first annual meeting (Spartanburg, NC, 2008) by past president Zack Murrell (2002–2004), who had organized a new herbarium organization through an NSF-funded networking grant. There I was welcomed with open arms by the dynamic duo, Conley McMullen (then President-Elect) and Charlie Horn (Treasurer). Within a year of that fateful meeting, I was elected to the Council (2009–2011), and then to president immediately after that! During my rapid trajectory in SABS participation, I have enjoyed meeting new colleagues (who have become friends) and have developed a multifaceted admiration for the society and its history (and for more on the latter, see the following article by Charlie Horn).

#### *Our Best PR and Shining Star*

Another recurrent presidential theme is great pride in *Castanea*, a shining star of SABS and our best public relations tool. Our well-known professional journal is now under the leadership of John Pascarella, Editor-in-Chief, plus nine subject editors and countless reviewers. As I mentioned, *Castanea* was my introduction to the society. I have “first-hand” experience of both sides of the rigorous review process: in recent years, I have reviewed nine manuscripts for the journal and have also published several floristically-based articles of my own within its covers. So, I appreciate our tradition of encouraging organismic-research (systematics, floristics, ecology), while successfully expanding the scope of articles to include all aspects of botany beyond the confines of the southeastern United States.

*Castanea* continues to evolve along with our changing times. Under Lytton's leadership, personnel at Allen Press have ably taken over the management of the journal, *Castanea* has increased accessibility through BioOne and JSTOR, the impact factor has increased to 0.338 (from 0.250 in 2010), and a new cover photo contest is currently underway. I impatiently await the stunning full color *Castanea* cover and new format in the forthcoming March 2013 issue! In addition, our sister publication, the newsletter *Chinquapin*, remains a popular venue for natural history. Dan Pittillo (president 1977) has kindly returned as interim editor.

#### *Awards and Rewards*

Another recurrent presidential theme is our strong financial condition. This fortunate circumstance is mainly due to the efforts of Donald Windler (president 1996–1998), who passed away earlier this year. Don was the driving force behind attaining the \$200K goal for the Endowment Fund, and he also established the Richard and Minnie Windler Award in honor of

his parents. I am pleased to report that as of 30 June 2012, the *Castanea* Endowment totals \$266,169; the Earl Core Fund, \$27,616; and the Windler Award Fund, \$34,686. (Thank you, Charlie, for these figures!).

Through these endowments, the society is able to fund student research projects and several professional and student awards (see <http://www.sabs.appstate.edu/Awards/Index.htm> for details). I congratulate this year's awardees: Audrey Mellichamp (Elizabeth Ann Bartholomew Award); James Schrader and William R. Graves (Windler Award); Matthew Hansen (Towson University; Earl Core Student Award); Andrea R. Benson (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Outstanding Student Contributed Paper Award); and Jennifer S. Stanley (North Carolina State University; Outstanding Student Poster Award). I encourage all members to *donate to our endowment funds, to nominate worthy individuals for the awards, and to urge your students to join the society and to apply for student awards.*

### *Thrive Beyond Survive*

Our society has great strengths, as exemplified by our publications and our financial status, plus we have a good membership base. However, our actual membership numbers have declined—from a peak of over 800 in 1996 to less than 500 today. How do we recruit (and retain) new members at various professional levels? This troubling issue has been addressed by our immediate past presidents with a call to action! I stress here the importance of the personal touch. Recently I have contacted several botanists who were either new faculty or long-lapsed members, and all have joined.

Recent efforts to encourage students to join SABS include new student presentation awards and a welcome reception at the annual meeting. The goal is to promote student involvement in our organization that will carry over into their professional careers. The new awards for best paper and poster presented at the annual meeting were instigated under my guidance at Huntsville (2011) and supervised by Edgar Lickey (Council Member-at-Large) last spring in Athens. Conley and Lytton initiated the student receptions at the Asheville meeting (2010), and our third get-together at the Athens meeting was again a huge success, as good food and good company attract students of all ages.

We also need to spread the word about the benefits of membership in SABS to a new generation of junior faculty members. To achieve this, I envision a concentrated effort involving direct contact by SABS state representatives who are familiar with the colleges in their area. I know well from personal experience the benefits of SABS membership to fledgling faculty. The most important is the opportunity to develop a network of colleagues and potential collaborators (and friends). Service for a national organization looks great in a promotion dossier, too! Authors are allotted 12 free pages in *Castanea* per year, an economical way to get those publications in print. Our annual meeting is an excellent venue to present research and for an advisor's students to hone their own presentation skills. The Core Award can provide financial support for the student research, which also benefits the overall program of the faculty advisor.

### *Congrats and Contacts*

I would like to take this opportunity to extend congratulations to the newly-elected council member, Richard Carter. Thank you also to Mac Alford, who was elected to serve a second term on the council, and to Michael Held, who will continue on as Membership Secretary. I depend on all members of the Council to guide me through my next two years as president, and I thank all society members who have volunteered their time to serve on our various committees.

If you have any suggestions or comments, please contact the Council members or me. Thank you all for your continued support of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society. I hope to see you—and your students—in Charleston, West Virginia, in April 2013!

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