

The Most Important Person at a Show

By Dave Bates

A question often asked is “who is the most important person at a show?” There are a number of different answers depending on your perspective, but in my mind there is only one critical person.

The exhibitors may think it is they, but there have been shows with very few exhibitors and, although their absence is noted the show can still continue. It may not be the spectacle that visitors expect, but that is recoverable in subsequent years. The exhibitors can spend their time producing the exhibits, but only have to turn up on the day. On arrival, they expect to have a choice of a vast array of staging tables and far more vases than they can possibly use! If they don't get all they want, where do they direct their complaints?

The judges may feel it is they, because who else could do justice to the judging process. However shows have continued when the judges have been unable to attend due to various problems and the organisers can usually find someone to stand in, even if they are not a qualified judge.

Over recent years, several shows have folded and so have several societies. The prime cause is the lack of people to do the necessary work to either run the show or administer the Society. My question is “How many shows exist without a show secretary and a supporting group behind them?” I suspect the answer would be none!

Quite often, the secretary's job is taken on by someone who can no longer grow the flowers but wishes to retain contact with the flower and camaraderie of the exhibitors. Not only that but it can be a fun and rewarding job to do.

So what does the show secretary do? They have to find and book the accommodation for the show on the nominated date, a task that gets more difficult by the year due to financial restrictions on potential venues. Quite often, they have to liaise with other local societies to avoid date clashes. They have to create and produce a schedule that can be accommodated by the venue well before the show date, and in time to allow exhibitors to plan their growing program. They then have to get the schedule to as many intending exhibitors as possible, then have to locate and book enough judges, and this is becoming harder as the number of qualified judges reduces, although the NDS are holding exams to allow more people to qualify as judges.

As the show date nears, they have to encourage helpers to prepare and erect the staging at the show, and when many of these are exhibitors, they find it difficult to spare the time!

A major early decision is do you have a final entry date or do you allow entries on the day. Neither of these is ideal. If entries are closed prior to the show date, all exhibitor's cards have to be produced, and entry money checked. Exhibitors need to be allocated numbers to identify their exhibits. Inevitably some exhibitors will want to change their entries on the day, making more work when the secretary is already under time pressures. The alternative of accepting entries on the day can be even worse!

On Show day, the staging and vases need to be present, and a water supply, plus rubbish sacks to allow the room to be tidied at the end of staging. Areas on the staging for each

class needs to be allocated, and this is easier if early entry is required, while with entry on the day only guesswork and past experience is available. A working area with a table is required for the secretary so that they can work adequately. Once exhibitors start to arrive, they require their entry cards, or have to give in their entries at the time. They need a number allocating, and the secretary spends time producing their exhibitors cards. Past experience shows that exhibitors do not give their entries to the secretary until the last minute, and it is almost impossible for exhibitors cards to be produced in time for the end of staging. If the show is lucky enough to have stewards to go round with the judges, the secretary then spends the time writing out the prize cards and updating the board with points attained as many shows have awards for the most points in various sections of the show.

The secretary's work is still not complete as usually they have to record all the results (including specials such as Silver Medal) and send details and results to the press and or society recorders

So the answer to my original question is the SHOW SECRETARY. Many societies, including the NDS, are fortunate to have good teams to support the secretary both before and during the show. At the NDS National Shows, both June Nash and Ian Ledger perform miracles and have magnificent support from the show committee and northern committee.

Having done the job for a few societies, I ask exhibitors to work with the secretary and help as much as possible by giving details early in the day so that the show can be run without any hitches. Remember that if you ignore or upset the Secretary to the extent that they decide to retire from the post, there may well be no show in the following years. It is up to all of us to support the person in post as much as possible to ensure the future of the society and their shows.