



### **Introductory Comments**

On July 15, we (Pat and I) returned to College Station following a productive two-month stay in Columbus, Ohio at Ohio State University. Our time here in College Station has passed quickly. We're headed overseas on August 12 for two months for the international portions of our travels. We'll be based in Ireland with visits in England, The Netherlands, Denmark, and perhaps France and Belgium. This newsletter will focus on activities in Ohio and Texas since early June and will provide highlights on two additional floriculture faculty, Cynthia McKenney and Brent Pemberton of our Dallas and Overton Centers, respectively.

I want to also introduce you to a new website that has been established for the Ellison Chair in International Floriculture. The website can be accessed at <http://EllisonChair.tamu.edu>

### **Chair Activities and Progress**

While in Ohio, I had the opportunity to visit several innovative greenhouse growing operations and garden centers. Among those were Justin Marotta of Possum Run Grenhouse in Bellville, Mike Berns of Berns Garden Center in Middletown, and Terry Diefenbacher of Diefenbacher Greenhouses, Inc. in Cincinnati. Rising energy costs are a major issue and concern

for them. Additionally I had excellent visits with John Holmes and Steve Carver at OFA Headquarters and with several faculty working in the 'green' industry at Columbus and Wooster.

A called Advisory Committee meeting was held in Houston on June 22-23 in conjunction with the Super Floral Show. At that meeting, we welcomed Ernesto Velez, Chairman of Asocolflores (Colombian Association of Flower Exporters), to our Advisory Committee and learned much about the most impressive activities of this group. Ernesto is a wonderful addition to our Advisory Committee.

A highlight of our stay in Columbus was participation in the OFA Short Course on July 8-12. This was my first opportunity to participate in this event and it was well-run and highly relevant, one of the very best shows of this nature that I've experienced. During the Short Course, we (several Advisory Committee members who were present and myself) introduced the Ellison Chair to the Board of Directors of FIRST (Floriculture Industry Research and Scholarship Trust), the OFA Board of Directors, and the Ohio State Kiplinger Chair Advisory Committee. Also, a meeting was held involving 22 selected Texas and Ohio academic and industry leaders in floriculture. We explored how industry and academia can work together at the national level for the benefit of the floriculture industry and

floriculture programs at land-grant universities. Each person indicated a key issue/need for industry or academia; we will follow up to develop this effort further. We hope to expand this group to include several other states and national leaders. Additionally, at OFA, we met with Peter Bretting, USDA-ARS, and Lin Schmale, SAF, regarding the Floriculture and Nursery Crop Research Initiative.

Upon returning to Texas, we welcomed our newest Advisory Committee member, Dr. Kosuke Ogawa, Professor of Marketing at Hosei University in Tokyo, Japan. On July 24-25, he received a great Texas welcome in Austin from Ellen and Jim Ellison and Jimmy and April Klepac of our Advisory Committee and Dr. Bill Welch of our TAMU Horticulture faculty. This, along with visits to growers and retailers in the Austin-San Antonio area, made his trip a successful one. Dr. Ogawa will visit College Station in March, 2006 during our Advisory Committee meeting then.

Finally, I had the opportunity to participate in the Southwest Greenhouse Growers Conference in Jacksonville, Texas on August 3-4 and to visit Jack Weatherford of our Advisory Committee at Weatherford Farms and Greenhouses in Stafford, Texas. All in all, it was a busy and productive two months.

### **Floriculture Faculty Highlights**

In this issue, we are highlighting Dr. Cynthia McKenney of our Dallas Research and Extension Center and Dr. Brent Pemberton of our Overton Center.



**Cynthia McKenney**

### ***Development and Selection of Wildflowers as New Crops***

Over the last 15 years, Cynthia McKenney has focused her research program on the development of improved wildflower selections for use as ornamentals in water conserving landscapes. This effort has included traveling throughout Texas collecting germplasm and entering the collected species into the ongoing plant improvement project. The most promising accessions are grown off in the greenhouse and transplanted in the field where traditional breeding methods are used to increase overall appearance including a more compact growth habit and increasing the length and intensity of floral display.

Several of these plants have been released from the program after a number of years of development and selection. To date, *Glandularia bipinnatifida* 'Vibrant Purple' and *Melampodium leucanthum* 'Plains' have been submitted for plant variety protection. In addition, accessions of *Salvia leucantha* and *Zinnia grandiflora* are in the process of being reviewed for potential trademark release. At this time there are a dozen more species that are at various stages in the program.

One of the most exciting and enjoyable aspects of this research program is the introduction of new species into the marketplace. Given that new species and new varieties stimulate the retail business, these improved natives are finding excellent acceptance by seasoned gardeners.



**Brent Pemberton**

Dr. Brent Pemberton is Texas Agricultural Experiment Station Project Leader for Ornamental Crops at the Texas A&M University Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Overton, Texas. Located in northeast Texas near Tyler, Overton is situated near large segments of the Texas ornamental industry involving bedding plant and garden rose production. Dr. Pemberton has been involved in research with these crops for many years. He conducts the East Texas Bedding Plant Greenhouse and Garden Performance Trials each year which includes hundreds of entries in both spring/summer and fall/winter trials. These trials have been expanded in cooperation with colleagues at the Texas A&M University Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Dallas and the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden. Recently, the award program North Texas Winners Circle has been instituted to recognize plants with outstanding performance at the three trial locations. In addition to the new plant trials, Dr. Pemberton's work has focused on studies with specific genera. Work on trailing petunias has focused on characterizing cultivar responses to photoperiod. Winter field trials with these plants has indicated that the sales of this crop could be extended to fall and late winter in this region, but lack of flowering under short days can be a limitation for marketing. However, many cultivars can be coaxed to flowering with supplemental lighting treatments while others can be flowered under natural days. In addition to petunias, work has focused on fibrous begonias.

When field-grown under full sun in this region, begonias frequently succumb to many soil-born diseases. To study this problem, Dr. Pemberton has teamed up with a plant pathologist to find that many cultivars of fibrous begonia exhibit tolerance to *Rhizoctonia*, a ubiquitous pathogen in this part of the country. Another area of specialty is with garden roses. Dr. Pemberton worked with cultural problems for many years, but recently has focused on postproduction handling problems and disease resistance. Each winter, many garden rose plants are shipped bare root from western field production areas and potted in Texas Nurseries for bud and bloom garden center sales. Studies with a colleague at the University of Arizona have found that cold storage can improve speed and quality of flowering and field conditions prior to

digging can affect this response.

Another area of focus involves resistance of roses to black spot, a serious pathogen on roses worldwide. In addition to many years of field evaluations of



cultivars for resistance to black spot, Dr. Pemberton has worked with a plant breeder at Texas A&M to do field screening of breeding populations for disease resistance so that the genetics of this character can be studied in more depth.

### Concluding Comments

The more I learn about the floriculture industry, the more encouraged, enthusiastic, and excited I become about its present and its future. We in academia also have a bright future as we serve this increasingly important industry, and ultimately, the consumer of its products. In Horticultural Sciences, there is increasing focus in Fruits and Vegetables on "Foods for Health". I have heard in my travels that Floriculture provides "Food for the Soul". I believe it is true.

## Upcoming Events

*TNLA Nursery/Landscape EXPO*  
Dallas, Texas  
August 19-21

*Four Oaks Trade Show*  
Macclesfield, Cheshire, England  
September 6-7

*Ellison Chair Advisory Committee*  
College Station, Texas  
October 14

*Horticulture Gathering*  
College Station, Texas  
October 14-16



*Tammy Landry, Editor/Program Coordinator*  
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