

Letter

from the president

FRED STANTON



Following in my grandparents' and parents' footsteps, I gradually became a gardener in the middle 1960s. Early endeavors were helping my parents with a vegetable garden and observing my father's efforts to landscape our yard. I was mildly disappointed when nearly all of the deciduous plants and trees became bare and there were no longer any leaves on the plants. One day in driving around Monmouth, I observed a large green-leafed plant in the midst of winter and thought that it was very impressive and incredible in that it kept its leaves all winter. It wasn't long before I planted four new Rhododendrons southeast of our house under a spreading Sugar Maple. Two of the four slowly died and the remaining two survived and became quite large as the years went by. One of the plants is Ignatius Sargent and the other is Roseum Elegans.

As the years went by my enthusiasm increased as did my experimenting in growing many different Rhododendron varieties along with deciduous Azaleas. Early on I realized that nearly all evergreen Azaleas don't survive in our winters, but several of the Deciduous Azaleas grew to heights of 15 feet tall and 10 feet across and were spectacular when in bloom.

At some point in the early 1980s I learned about the Midwest Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and that they met at the Chicago Botanical Garden on the north edge of Glencoe, IL. I was delighted in finding the Rhododendron enthusiasts, sharing our experiences in growing Rhododendrons and our successes and failures, comparing notes on old and new varieties and becoming friends through the years.

As some of you know, there are a number of us that are still members of our chapter since the early days. Many of the members we have acquired over the past twenty-five years have become dedicated members and some have gone on their way. As with most organizations, membership is difficult to maintain or to increase in recent years. Perhaps with the downturn in our economy, we will see a greater interest in gardening and growing such premier plants as the Rhododendrons and Azaleas.

The coming spring will undoubtedly reflect our disappointment in the loss of some bloom, but I hope that overall our 'ironclads' and hardier varieties will still present us with their beautiful compliment of blooms to our spring season.

Hope to see many of you at our plant sale Mother's Day weekend, May 9th and 10th!