

President's Greeting: Denver IPPS 2008[©]

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About 9 years ago I spoke at an IPPS meeting; when my then-5-year-old daughter Chloe learned of this she was surprised I was capable of doing so. She asked me, "What did you talk to the people about, dad?"

I responded, "Well, Chloe, I talked to them about plants."

She then asked, "Do you know anything about plants?"

I allowed that, "perhaps I know a little."

Then she asked, "Did you tell them everything you know?"

I get to speak for only a few minutes; which according to Chloe should be about enough time to tell you everything I know, so here goes.

We are here in Denver for a historic meeting of the combined Western and Eastern Regions. I would like to offer my thanks for the hard work that has gone into putting this meeting together; there has been a great deal of effort and sacrifice and we ought all be grateful. Those of us that have walked in your shoes understand what it took to get to this point. In a couple days you will feel like you've been on a long backpack trip and remember the feeling of lightness when you shed your pack at the end of the trail.

At the beginning of this meeting I would like to give a short history lesson to those of you that are new to our organization and a refresher to you old timers. The International Plant Propagators' Society was birthed in 1951 from the vision and passion of a group of men and women who sought to create an organization dedicated to the free exchange of knowledge with an emphasis on solidarity and brotherhood. They saw membership as an honor and a prize to be sought after.

They also saw our industry and propagation in particular as a highly skilled craft. James Wells, in the first presentation of the inaugural meeting in 1951, made this clear: "I have often thought that the plant propagator is more closely akin to the medical profession than to any other, for surprisingly similar qualities are required both for the good doctor and the good plantsman. A long and rigorous initial period of training followed by slow and sometimes painful acquisition of knowledge through a lifetime devoted to his work are equally true of both. The comparison is even closer when one considers how much success may depend upon painstaking study, the careful consideration of all factors, before a diagnosis is given and treatment prescribed, for in both professions it is such attention to small intangible details that make the difference between success and failure."

A favorite quote of mine is from John Steinbeck, who echoed Mr. Wells' sentiments and summed up the spirit of propagation as well as possible in his book, *The Grapes of Wrath*: "The men who graft the young trees, the little vines, are the cleverest of all, for theirs is a surgeon's hands and a surgeon's heart to slit the bark, to place the grafts, to bind the wounds and cover them from the air. These are great men."

The lifeblood of the nursery industry is arguably the art and science of propagation. Propagation is the nursery industry's "nursery"; wherein new life takes form to provide future trees and shrubs. Mr. Steinbeck and Mr. Wells both have eloquently

expressed the sentiment that many of us have long held. I guess that makes IPPS the American Medical Association of the horticultural world.

Having been a member of IPPS now for approaching 30 years I can safely say that no organization, whether university, government, or trade organization has had as much value to the growth of my ability and knowledge as a propagator and grower. The relationships and friendships formed and the knowledge gained have been hugely significant, and I know I am not alone in this regard.

I would like to end with a challenge. IPPS was born of the vision of true leaders and dedicated individuals who sought the betterment of the industry and the creation of an organization with the highest ideals; an organization that would and did take on a life of its own. What is necessary for this to continue and prosper is the willing involvement of its members to give of their time and energies; to commit themselves as speakers, as directors and officers, as committee members, and to actively support the organization. It is a step that comes with a promise; as you stretch yourself on the behalf of IPPS, you will experience growth and find great reward.