

Middle Tennessee Daylily Society

By Jay Turman

“How do you start a Daylily Society?”

...That was the question I asked Region 10 RVP Stuart Oakes at the Regional meeting in Chattanooga in 1989. He shrugged his shoulders and replied, “You just start it”. After that fountain of information I asked the newly elected RVP, Lee Pickles, the same question and received virtually the same answer. The start of this saga began in Europe in 1982 when we met a very quiet, scrawny, little old lady that was on the same tour. During the two weeks the tour lasted we became friends and were amazed to hear that she was a well-known hybridizer of daylilies and lived in Murfreesboro. Since we were daylily enthusiasts she asked Peggy and me to visit her at her farm during daylily blooming season where we'd sit on her back porch and look at 2 ½ acres of daylily seedlings while drinking box wine. We became good friends over the years and were surprised when she gave us memberships to AHS and paid for our registrations at the aforementioned Regional. While there we met Mitchell Leichhardt and his niece Cindy Schott from Bowling Green, KY, who agreed that we should have a daylily society in Nashville. By placing a small announcement in the Green Hill News of the founding meeting eleven people gathered in our living room in the fall of 1989. Virginia was one of those 11. She smiled a lot that night but remained silent and aloof. Almost every one there was elected to the board of the Middle TN Daylily Society except her. She simply declined. The second meeting in November of 1990 was held at Cheekwood with 19 daylily fanciers including Earl and Laura Rosser, new transplants from Atlanta and daylily judges. After the program given by Casey Schott of slides of Mitchell Leichhardt's daylily hybridizing as well as gardens he had visited around the country, Earl had the nerve to suggest that we have a daylily show that summer. With Earl volunteering to be chairman six daylily judges were invited to judge our first show “We've Only Just Begun” on the third Saturday in June at Cheekwood. We had no money. To pay for the show lots of ads were sold to appear in our show schedule and boxes of daylilies were sold by color...not name...and we sold out. Cola and wine bottles were used as our containers with the bottles camouflaged by wrapping them in green construction paper held with matching green rubber bands on matching green table cloths made by Peggy Turman. Judges were given honorariums of a big \$25 dollars. Judge Lillian Grovenstein from Atlanta returned her check with the suggestion we use the money to “buy flower holders”. That fall we held a daylily sale at a garden nursery where 300-400 would-be gardeners cleaned us out in 4 hours and we made \$4,800.00...enough to buy those flower holders...custom made flower holders! At the end of 1990 our members numbered 80...but we lost our most important one, Virginia Peck, whose gentle impetus started the MTDS ball rolling. At only 18 months old we took on the huge project of hosting the Region 10 Meeting. Seventy three people, including the AHS President Dorothea Bolt, attended with David Kirchhoff from Florida as the main speaker. We bused attendees to various local gardens and Opryland on Saturday and the next day to Bowling Green, KY, to the Schotts and Leichhardt gardens. The registration was \$45 with the price of a room at the Holiday Inn Vanderbilt costing \$56. As if this was not enough to do we also had our second annual daylily show, “Second Time Around”, the same weekend. Later in 1991 we planted a beautiful daylily garden on the grounds of Cheekwood Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center. We asked hybridizers from all over the country to donate their finest daylilies to be on display here and they really responded. A total of 255 beautiful cultivars were planted in a design by Mitchell Leichhardt around a beautiful lattice gazebo. The Virginia Peck garden was our main project for years until, sadly, it was done away with by a new regime at Cheekwood and a well-known garden designer from NYC who didn't think it “fit in” with Cheekwood's plans. 1991 also was the year we began an unusual event called the Cultivar Acquisition Program...or CAP. It was started to coerce more people to join the AHS by simply rewarding only those members that were AHS members and attended a certain number of events and meetings with a new daylily cultivar from a chosen hybridizer. After growing the daylily for two years, one fan was

returned and planted in the Virginia Peck Daylily Garden and one fan was kept by the grower with the remaining increases auctioned off to MTDS members. We still have the extremely popular Cultivar Acquisition Program however. Now, however, at the end of a two year period, the grower keeps 2 fans and the rest of the increases are returned to be auctioned off to the members. It is so popular that the auction has almost paid for the expense of the program. One of the most exciting events in our short life was in 1992 when we hosted the fall AHS Board of Directors meeting. Nell Jessup was president and Darrel Apps, Ken Cobb, Betty Roberts and Bertie Ferris were just of the few that represented all regions of the country. The business meeting was at a motel but we entertained them at night with dinners at the homes of Walt & Liz Gobble and Mike and Betsy Lindseth with all our membership invited. Nell wrote, "We enjoyed the privilege of sharing time with all the members and being able to visit the two lovely homes which were so graciously opened to us. We were impressed with the interest, enthusiasm, and cooperation among the members and again we thank you for the hospitality extended to us. The rest of 1992 went smoothly also. Every year we've had a larger show still with only 9 judges. Two years ago the 340 entries we had proved to be the second largest show in the country. Nine judges have never worked so fast or done such a good job! The Virginia Peck Memorial Award, a cash prize, is one of our unique show aspects. Only one VP cultivar, not entered elsewhere in the show, per member is allowed. We were honored with a certificate of appreciation for our community service at Cheekwood by the Intermuseum Council of Nashville. The certificate was presented at the annual ICON awards luncheon at the Hermitage, home of Andrew Jackson plus The Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. gave us an Award of Merit for several daylily shows including "Daylilies on the Cumberland". Each year we have at least twelve meetings. Some are work sessions, but meetings of any sort seem to involve food. Food is very popular with our 100 plus members. Also our yearly standard is inviting a hybridizer to speak. The exception was the year we invited Sydney Eddison, the author of "A Passion for Daylilies", to speak. After all these years people still mention that evening. For our 20th anniversary we had a catered luncheon that brought out old daylily friends. Ditto for our 25th anniversary but for a very exciting addition. Linda Hassler gave all attending a fan of her beautiful new introduction "25th Anniversary". This year we are celebrating thirty years and we've grown considerably. Neither Stuart Oakes nor Lee Pickles told me that good dedicated hard workers are necessary for a successful club. But we obviously have been blessed with them. I think Virginia Peck would be proud.



Flower Show at Cheekwood



Early Flower Show Display



Jay Turman and Nell Jessup



Early Display Garden at Cheekwood



Virginia Peck