

DON'T JUST READ THE NEWSLETTER, COME JOIN US FOR PROGRAMS THIS YEAR

I first joined the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society in about 2008, after a brief encounter with Kathy Van Veen turned into a fascinating two hours touring her propagation facilities at Van Veen Nursery and talking with her about her family's three generation history of propagating rhododendrons in southeast Portland.

For the next two years I received the Portland Chapter's newsletter. I enjoyed it and thought the programs and activities looked intriguing, but it wasn't until the fall of 2010 that I finally walked through the door and met the members.

I remember Dick Cavender immediately spotted me as a new face as I walked in and took me under his wing, introducing me to other members, getting me settled at his table, and promising that if I turned up at Red's (Dick's) Rhodies I wouldn't leave without a free rhododendron in hand.

I came away from that meeting thinking that rhododendron folks were a lot like their rhododendrons. Varied certainly, but by and large down to earth and low maintenance, likeable and fun, solid and outgoing.

I rarely missed a meeting after that. I heard a lot of fine programs and great speakers, and I made a lot of new friends. I soon had lots of experts to answer my many questions.

Now as I am writing my first column as President, it occurs to me that there are a lot of you out there, receiving these newsletters, who are just waiting, as I was, to take the next step of coming through the door on the third Thursday of September. I know that in the last few years at the Portland Home & Garden Show and at the Crystal Springs Mother's Day Sale, we have talked to a lot of people who love rhododendrons and azaleas, and have joined as members of the local Portland Chapter. (I think we had more than 20 people join as local members this last Mothers' Day weekend alone, although this is the first newsletter that those new members will receive).

I want to invite each of you to take that next step and come on in for our next meeting and program, which will be on September 15, 2016 (third Thursday). I know Caroline Enns and her speakers' committee are putting together a fine series of programs for the upcoming season. There will be more details about programs and activities in the next newsletter. But in the meantime, please put that evening on your calendar now and plan to arrive early and get acquainted with us and with each other. We will do our best to make you feel welcome.

Dennis O'Malley
