



**St. Augustine Orchid Society**

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

## **The Care and Feeding of Orchid Society Speakers**

by Sue Bottom, [sbottom15@gmail.com](mailto:sbottom15@gmail.com)

Scheduling speakers for the monthly meeting is not easy for any orchid society. Some orchid societies enjoy excellent programs each month, while others struggle to obtain speakers. Funds might seem to be the main obstacle, but often it is not a monetary issue. Instead, it can be a flawed process in getting speakers and the reputation a society has created that limits a club's ability to obtain speakers. Some speakers do rely on selling orchids when they present a program, but most speak to orchid clubs because they enjoy sharing their hobby and meeting fellow addicts. While not every speaker will present a program that interests everyone or be a captivating speaker, every speaker does expend a lot of personal effort providing a program for your club.



*1. Before Ruben Sauleda moved to Paradise, he used to come talk to our club every year. How we miss him!*

*The Process.* Most Orchid Societies have an individual, the Program Chair, or committee who is responsible for issuing invitations. The job requires a lot of time and effort as well as good communication skills in order to schedule speakers. This may include travel arrangements, an honorarium and making sure speakers are hosted for dinner and overnight stays if they are travelling long distances. Each speaker is unique to some degree and requires a Program Chair willing to work with them to ensure both the orchid society and speaker enjoy their visit. Failure to do so may make it difficult to find individuals willing to come and speak to your

society. A society may be burdened with a bad reputation for years if the Program Chair fails to follow some basic rules. Individuals who present programs to orchid societies communicate with each other and quickly learn which societies to avoid.

*Program Chair.* The Program Chair may be the most important officer in an Orchid Society as their role is critical to each meeting. Ideally, orchid societies have an individual in this role for many years. Given the steep learning curve required for this position, there is great value in effectively transferring the accumulated knowledge from the outgoing Program Chair to their successor. Written documentation that should be transferred to a new Program Chair includes a database with speaker contact information, templates of standardized speaker invitation and confirmation letters along with a checklist



*2. Occasionally, you may get a chance to talk to potential speakers at a show; often it is just too busy to have a real conversation.*



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for the Program Chair to follow for each speaker. Each confirmed speaker should receive a document that summarizes everything they need to know about your society and monthly meetings, as well as all the agreed to financial arrangements.



*3. From top left, Fred Clarke, Gene Crocker, Keith Davis, Courtney Hackney, Alan Koch, Francisco Miranda, Ben Oliveros, Bill Thoms, Bob Scully Jr, and Roy Tokunaga, and so many more great speakers.*



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*Make It Fun.* Engage your speakers; they are doing you a tremendous favor by taking the time out of their busy schedules to talk to your club. Make it fun for them; plan to entertain them before the meeting with a nice dinner. Ask them what kind of a restaurant they would prefer and if there are any foods to avoid. Get them to the meeting with plenty of time for them to set up their sales table or talk to members before the crowds arrive. If they are coming from a long distance, offer to have them stay with you or make reservations at a convenient motel if they prefer. Do not assume that every speaker likes the same things. Some speakers prefer a good night's sleep after their program, while others enjoy late night libations with your members. Be sure to ask your speaker what they prefer. Ask about breakfast preferences. Some speakers need to return home immediately, while others enjoy visiting local sights or even a fishing trip. Other club members can contribute greatly by hosting them, giving them a tour or helping with whatever interests them. It is a great chance to learn firsthand from the experts. A conversation about local activities with a speaker during the invitation process may even gain a speaker that otherwise might not have accepted your invitation. These are your guests, so treat them as family. By the time they leave, you want them to feel like family and want to return in the future.

*Scheduling.* Do not wait until the last minute to fill your schedule. Most speakers have started filling their calendars twelve months or more in advance of any given date. Start scheduling speakers in early summer for the following year. During the winter/spring show season, commercial growers are running on fumes. Asking about presenting a program then invites rejection. Instead, say something like my club members have been asking me to invite you to speak to our club, can I contact you after the show season dies down. Get the contact information, buy something from their booth and smile appreciatively. Speakers who are not commercial growers are often just as busy. Approaching them 12 months or more ahead of time allows them to mesh personal plans, i.e., vacations or visits to family with a program to your society. By Labor Day, the next year's schedule should be set. Dedicate a page to next year's speakers in the December newsletter and on the website. Be sure to copy your speakers with this newsletter. Cancellations do occur, so have a backup plan for emergencies, e.g. one of the AOS webinars, a club member that can talk to the group or a nearby speaker you know well that will fill in. Other than in emergencies, do not ask a speaker to come talk to your club the next month. You risk giving the impression that the speaker is just an afterthought rather than the main event.

*Speaker List.* The Society should maintain a list of speakers with company and contact information listed, along with the subjects of their presentations. For those speakers that have spoken to the club already, be sure those dates and topics are listed. This list can then be handed off to a new Program Chair who will be responsible for updating it and adding new potential speakers during their term of volunteer service.

*Invitation Letter.* A quick email to find out whether a speaker is interested in speaking to your club is fine, but this should be followed with correspondence that is more detailed. Develop a formal invitation letter for use as a template. It should contain all the information the



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speaker would otherwise have to ask: the date and time of the meeting, number of likely attendees, type of computer and projector system, honoraria, travel, dinner and hosting arrangements, etc. A sample of the [standard invitation letter](#) used by the St. Augustine Orchid Society is available on the SAOS website. With this format, the invitation letter can be updated as speakers are booked and reused until all the speakers are scheduled for the year.

<b>Checklist of Information Your Speaker Wants to Know</b>	
<b>During Initial Discussions</b>	
Date, time and place of meeting	Compile all this information into a <a href="#">Speaker Invitation Letter</a> , see example using this link:  <a href="https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-1.pdf">https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-1.pdf</a>
Number of likely attendees	
Honorarium, travel reimbursement, overnight accommodations, raffle plant opportunities	
Details of computer set up at meeting place (for digital programs), any special instructions	
<b>After Speaker Agrees to Talk to Your Club</b>	
Confirmation of all items agreed to in initial discussions, with specific details on agreed upon honoraria, travel arrangements, and overnight accommodations	Compile all this information into a <a href="#">Speaker Confirmation Letter</a> , see example using this link:  <a href="https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-2.pdf">https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-2.pdf</a>
<b>Well Before the Meeting Date</b>	
Reconfirm all prior agreements above, plus:	Compile all this information into a <a href="#">Meeting Details Letter</a> , see example using this link:  <a href="https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-3.pdf">https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/OSSpeaker-3.pdf</a>
Specify the program to be presented	
Specify how much time is allotted for the speaker's program, along with a brief time line description of your meeting's agenda	
Give some insights about your members tastes in orchids, to help your speaker select plants for the raffle and sales tables	
Describe the number of tables or hanging racks available to the speaker sales area	
Find out if there is a preorder listing and publicize it to your members, along with a cutoff date for ordering	
For speakers travelling long distances, specify the address of the hotel or member's home where they will spend the night. If flying in, obtain the flight itinerary.	
Exchange mobile phone numbers	

**Travel.** Speakers travelling to your club may request travel expenses in addition to their honorarium. If travelling by car, this may be a flat fee or a per mile round trip rate. If flying in to speak, the club can either pay for the rental car or have a member pick up the speaker from the airport and drive them from point to point. This is a great way for club volunteers to get some face time with the speaker and save the club some money, and it eases the burden of travel on the speaker.



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*Joint Programs.* Many societies cooperate and coordinate their meetings, so they can share speakers and travel expenses. Some speakers like the arrangement, while others do not enjoy all the travel and daily speaking engagements. Ferrying the speaker from club to club can make this whole process more pleasant for the speaker.

*Confirmation.* Once the club and speaker come to an agreement, formalize it in a written confirmation letter. This may simply be a version of the invitation letter template, updated with any changes to the agreed upon terms for travel arrangements, etc. If you send this confirmation note by email, make sure the speaker emails you back or you have a return receipt requested note to make sure the note has been received. It is too easy for email to go into junk and spam mail folders without your knowledge. Until you have this confirmation, you have not booked your speaker. The basic template can be customized to reflect the specific agreements made with each speaker. A sample of the [confirmation letter](#) used by the St. Augustine Orchid Society for shared speakers is available on the SAOS website.

*Meeting Details.* Several weeks before the scheduled meeting date, resend the meeting details letter to refresh the speaker's memory and reaffirm agreements. Exchange mobile phone numbers so you can contact each other in the event of last minute glitches. If the speaker has a preorder list, you can post in on the Society webpage and send it around to members. Make sure to note a cutoff date for preorders so the speaker is not still receiving orders the morning of the meeting. This basic template can be updated for each speaker. A sample of the [meeting details letter](#) used by the St. Augustine Orchid Society is available on the SAOS website.

When your meeting date rolls around, all that is left for you to do is have fun and learn new things. We would have a hard time indulging our hobby without our Orchid Society speakers and commercial orchid growers. They put a lot of work and effort into talking to your club and the honorarium does not adequately compensate them. Help empty the sales table at your meeting and visit the sales booths of commercial growers at the shows. It is in the best interest of all orchid growers that our commercial orchid growers live long and prosper.

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