

APFGA 2019 Year-End Report

Mark Wolbers, President

This was a year of opportunity and challenges. Through it all, your board worked to serve the membership by carrying out the club's activities and to promote and support the growing of fruit in Alaska.

In November, Treasurer Gary Masog wrote 99 checks for cherry refunds on plants that members reported died or were struggling. Thank you, Debbie Hinchey, for negotiating the settlement and handling last year's plant orders and deliveries.

On the opportunity side, last year Gary Masog placed the winning bid at the Laywer's Nursery liquidation auction to purchase their remaining lots of Baccata apple rootstock. Consequently, we were blessed at the spring Grafting Workshop to have ample rootstock at a very good price for our members.

We had a number of smaller left-over rootstock that the board decided to pot up to grow out at the Government Hill Commons. The Board potted about 300 rootstock to grow over the summer. With fall approaching we needed to either have a strategy for storing the rootstock over the winter (i.e. refrigeration or outside) or to avoid the issue entirely. Consequently, we decided to try selling them and sold all of them this fall.

On the challenge side, we needed to find a replacement source for apple rootstock for the 2020 Grafting Workshop. The club has contracted with Schumacher's Nursery in Minnesota for a thousand Red Splendor rootstock, a selection of Malus Baccata that they claim performs well across the state of Minnesota. I have a Red Splendor crab in my yard, and it does appear to be hardy in addition to being a stunning landscape tree with beautiful flowers and small dark red crabs that the birds like.

We did attempt to work with North American Plants (NAP) to propagate the rootstock that has performed well at the rootstock trial at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer. NAP expressed willingness to attempt this cloning project for free, but have so far failed to return a Materials Transfer Agreement that needs to be signed before the PMC will release the plant material. We will keep trying to move that project forward. If we can get their cooperation, it means we may be able to clone a rootstock that we know does well with our climatic challenges. However, there are many unknowns to this project even if propagation occurs.

On the opportunity side, we did explore possible involvement in the re-purposing of the old Native Hospital land downtown. It could be a location to have a public education/research orchard. However, the board agreed that without the ability to have control over a piece of land that APFGA could fence and develop, this was not something that the club would be involved in or invest in.

This past year's climate change was the most dramatic yet. The entire past 12 months has been unseasonably warm. With a very warm spring, I anticipated that the apple blossoms would be one week earlier than in 2018. So, at the end of April, I set the date for the blossom tour, only to be followed by the wettest May on record. This pushed the blossom time back again one week, but we enjoyed the cherry blossoms none the less.

The climate also presented challenges in the form of water. If you didn't water, your apples were undersized. Even in Homer, we witnessed growers struggling for water as sources dried up. On the opportunity side, just about every apple variety achieved ripeness, often 2 to 3 weeks early. Cherries were less likely to split, and sugar content was good for all fruits.

The ripening time caused the apple pressing dates to be moved up, and we added an additional pressing date so the three pressings were each two weeks apart. We had an excellent turnout for the apple pressings, which made the necessity of acquiring a better and faster press more, well, pressing.

On the challenge side, Governor Dunleavy's approach to the budget caused chaos in all state agencies. This included the further hollowing out of the University and elimination of any funding for agriculture. The Plant Materials Center, let people go and closed out their state funded research. Some funding got restored later by the legislature, but much damage had already been done. The apple tasting at the PMC in October was just not a priority for them and so it did not happen this year.

In conclusion, a summary of our yearly activities consisted of:

5 Monthly Meetings with instructional presentations by:

Gary Masog, Ilona Farr, Rusty Foreaker, Judith James, and Debbie Hinchey

6 Workshops and Tours:

Grafting Workshop at Spenard Church of Love, March 23

Pruning Workshop at Boyer's Greenhouse, April 13

Topworking Workshop at Ellen Vande Visse's, Palmer, May 4

Orchard Blossom Tour – Clark Orchard, June 1

Orchard Tour – Maison Wolbers, July 27

Orchard Tour – Fire Apple Orchard, August 17

3 Apple Pressings at Brown Hen Farm

August 31, 2019

September 14, 2019

September 28, 2019

1 Apple/fruit tasting at BP Energy Center, September 19, 2019