

Review

Pi Alpha Xi—A Tradition of Excellence in Floriculture, Landscape Horticulture, and Ornamental Horticulture

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SUMMARY. Pi Alpha Xi, founded in 1923, is the national honor society for floriculture, landscape horticulture and ornamental horticulture. Since its founding, it has grown to 36 chapters at baccalaureate-granting institutions. Its mission is to promote scholarship, fellowship, professional leadership, and the enrichment of human life through plants.

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The author was inducted into the Zeta Chapter, Rutgers University (New Brunswick, N.J.), and has been a member or advisor of three other Phi Alpha Xi chapters: Epsilon, The Ohio State University (Columbus); Omega, Kansas State University (Manhattan); and Alpha Beta, The University of Tennessee (Knoxville). The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by Dr. Doug Needham of Oklahoma State University (Stillwater) and Pi Alpha Xi web master and Dr. Dave Graper of South Dakota State University (Brookings) and 2000-02 Pi Alpha Xi National President, in the preparation of this manuscript.

What do 26 American Society for Horticultural Science presidents (Table 1) from Liberty Hyde Bailey, the first ASHS president, to Dan Lineberger, our current president, all have in common? They are all members of Pi Alpha Xi.

Pi Alpha Xi (PAX) was founded in 1923. The idea to form an honor society for those in floriculture, as told in the *Ritual for the Initiation Ceremony*, came from “an impromptu, after-dinner discussion among representatives of several universities attending the International Flower Show held [in] New York City in 1923. A group of individuals from Cornell University (Ithaca, N.Y.), led by the late Arno Nehrling, developed the organization, wrote the first constitution and ritual and designed the insignia. The formal installation of the Alpha Chapter was at Cornell University on June 1, 1923, after nearly 2 years of effort on Professor Nehrling’s part to organize an honor society (PAX, 1988d).

Over the first five decades, PAX saw very little growth. The only chapters organized during that time were Alpha (Cornell University), Beta (University of Illinois, Urbana), Gamma (The Pennsylvania State University, University Park), Delta (Michigan State University, East Lansing), Epsilon (The Ohio State University, Columbus), and Zeta (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.). During the 1970s, PAX saw its greatest expansion with 18 chapters being established in the decade (PAX, 1975b, 1978, 1980b). As horticulture programs grew in breadth and student numbers, PAX expanded membership from solely floriculture students, faculty and industry members to include those in landscape horticulture and ornamental horticulture.

Only the top students in the junior and senior classes with a demonstrated interest in floriculture, landscape horticulture, and/or ornamental horticulture are invited to join. Graduate students and faculty members with an emphasis in these fields are also eligible. Candidates should show promise of continued activity and interest in the field.

The honor society, originally established to unify students, educators, and professional horticulturists, was formed to promote high scholarship, fellowship, professional leadership, and the enrichment of human life through plants. In fact, the name Pi Alpha Xi comes from three Greek words, each starting with one of the letters in the honor society’s name. Pi is the first letter of the Greek word, *Polumathia*, meaning scholarship. Alpha, the second word in the society’s name, is from the Greek word, *Anthemorgous*, meaning to work with plants. Xi represents the Greek word, *Zunoia*, meaning mutual kindness signifying companionship, the bond among gardeners, educators and professional horticulturists (PAX, 2000b).

Today there are 36 chapters (Table 2) and nearly 12,000 members. These chapters are located in the United States at 4-year institutions with programs in floriculture, landscape horticulture, and ornamental horticulture. The level of chapter activity varies. Some chapters exist solely to recognize academic excellence through the initiation of new members. Others offer an array of activities to their members, such as sponsored lectures by visiting professors and other professionals, sponsored field trips to horticultural sites, and support for student travel to the ASHS annual conference and the National Intercollegiate Floral Crop Quality Evaluation and Design Competition. Operating budgets for chapters come from a variety of sources including departmental funding, dues to the local chapters, student activities funds, fundraisers such as plant sales, conducting fee-based horticultural workshops, and support from local members of the horticulture industry. If you are located at an institution with an inactive chapter and are interested in reactivating it, contact the national president of PAX. Current officers are listed at the PAX National (the name used to distinguish national organization from its chapters) web site at

Table 1. ASHS presidents who have been initiated into Pi Alpha Xi.

President ^z	Term in office (year)	Chapter (member no.) ^y
Liberty Hyde Bailey	1903–1907	Alpha (27)
Maurice A. Blake	1916	Zeta (8)
Joseph C. Blair	1922	Beta (19)
Joseph Harvey Gourley	1923	Epsilon (50)
Ezra J. Kraus	1927	Zeta
Alex Laurie	1936	Delta (1)
Laurence H. MacDaniels	1940	Alpha (168)
Warren B. Mack	1945	Gamma (77)
Harold B. Tukey, Sr.	1947	Delta (132)
Samuel L. Emsweller	1950	Theta
Kenneth Post	1952	Delta (2)
Milton B. Davis	1956	Gamma (107)
Freeman S. Howlett	1959	Epsilon (108)
Howard A. Rollins, Sr.	1960	Kappa (9)
Vernon T. Stoutemyer	1961	Beta (32)
Russell E. Larson	1964	Gamma (174)
H. John Carew	1966	Gamma (65)
Neil W. Stuart	1968	Theta (42)
John P. Mahlstede	1972	Delta (122)
Charles E. Hess	1973	Zeta (67)
John G. Seeley	1983	Zeta (21)
Roy A. Larson	1989	Alpha (339)
Thomas A. Fretz	1992	Theta (92)
John W. Kelly	2000	Pi (23)
Paul L. Smeal	2001	Gamma (193)
R. Daniel Lineberger	2002	Alpha (481)

^zPresidents and years in office as listed in the ASHS Membership Directory, 2001.

^yPi Alpha Xi membership information from *The Lotus Leaf* (Pi Alpha Xi, 1975a, 1980).

<<http://www.pax.okstate.edu>> (PAX, 2002d).

While all current chapters are hosted by institutions in the United States, the constitution and bylaws do not prohibit formation of chapters outside the United States. According to the constitution and bylaws of the PAX National, “any university or college offering 4 years of baccalaureate instruction in floriculture, landscape horticulture or ornamental horticulture is eligible to establish a chapter” (PAX, 2000c). More detailed information is available at the PAX National web site (PAX, 2002d). Once the required documentation is reviewed by the PAX National Board of Directors, the petition is submitted to current chapters for review and a vote. Approval is granted if there is an affirmative vote by 2/3 of the active PAX chapters (PAX, 2000d).

The goals of PAX National are promoted through the work of the individual chapters and by PAX National. Before the 1990s, the main activities of PAX National were the National Intercollegiate Floral Crop Quality Evaluation and Design Competition (cosponsored by the American Floral Endowment) and the publication of the *Pi*

Alpha Xi Flower Judging Manual (PAX, 1998, 2002a). The PAX Fellows Program was added in 1986 by the Board of Directors (PAX, 1988b, 1988c). Beginning in 1991 when ASHS held its annual conference at University Park, Pa., PAX National began to hold its business meeting in conjunction with the ASHS conference. Before that business meeting, the annual business meeting was held in the spring in conjunction with the Intercollegiate Flower Judging Contest and was attended primarily by the flower judging team coaches. By making the switch in meeting time, a broader segment of the membership could participate. PAX National instituted the Pi Alpha Xi Annual Photography Contest, held each year since 1996 in conjunction with the annual ASHS conference, and started a scholarship program (PAX, 1996).

National intercollegiate floral crop quality evaluation and design competition

The first intercollegiate flower judging contest was held in 1938 in Toronto, Canada. In the early years,

the contest was held in major cities away from college campuses with generally fewer than ten teams competing. Then in 1955, The Ohio State University became the first school to host an on-campus contest. With the exception of 1979 when the contest was cohosted by the University of Georgia (Athens) and Auburn University (Auburn, Ala.) at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Ga., the contest has remained on college campuses (PAX, 1988a). During the 1970s when horticulture programs saw tremendous growth in undergraduate enrollment, the flower judging contest also saw an increase in participation peaking at 24 teams participating in the 1979 contest at Callaway Gardens. In 1993, the name of the contest was updated to its present name (PAX, 1993). The 60th annual competition, held in 2001, was hosted by California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo. The 2002 contest was hosted by the University of Wisconsin-River Falls; in 2003, it will be hosted by New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

Recently, the annual competition generally attracts teams from about 10 to 15 universities. Teams can enter the crop quality evaluation competition [about 25 to 30 classes of plant material each with four specimens (individual potted plants or containers of cut flowers of varying quality)], the design competition (amateur and professional divisions), or both (PAX, 2002b, 2002c). Training for the competition varies by school. Most either offer the training as a for-credit course or as an extracurricular activity. Training develops an understanding by students about high quality plant material and trains them to identify quality characteristics. The vehicle used is traditional floriculture crops – potted flowering and foliage plants, fresh cut flowers, and plants in hanging baskets – however, the basic principles of plant quality can be applied to nursery stock, fruits, and vegetables, as well.

The host institution will arrange industry tours for the competing teams. The floral design portion of the competition is judged by local, leading floral designers. Students often have the opportunity to have their design work critiqued by American Institute of Floral Design (AIFD) certified designers. To help prepare new coaches and students, PAX National publishes the *Pi Alpha Xi Flower Judging*

Table 2. Chapters of Pi Alpha Xi as of August 2001.

Chapter	Institution
Alpha	Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.
Beta	University of Illinois, Urbana
Gamma	Pennsylvania State University, University Park
Delta	Michigan State University, East Lansing
Epsilon	The Ohio State University, Columbus
Zeta	Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.
Eta	Washington State University, Pullman
Theta	University of Maryland, College Park
Iota	North Carolina State University, Raleigh
Kappa	Virginia Polytechnic & State University, Blacksburg
Lambda	University of Minnesota, St. Paul
Mu	University of Florida, Gainesville
Nu	Auburn University, Auburn, Ala.
Xi	New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
Omicron	Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.
Pi	Clemson University, Clemson, S.C.
Rho	University of Wisconsin–Madison
Sigma	Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Ill.
Tau	University of Georgia, Athens
Upsilon	California Polytechnic State University–San Luis Obispo
Phi	South Dakota State University, Brookings
Chi	Colorado State University, Fort Collins
Psi	Texas A&M University, College Station
Omega	Kansas State University, Manhattan
Alpha Beta	University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Alpha Gamma	University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Alpha Delta	Oklahoma State University, Stillwater
Alpha Epsilon	University of California–Davis
Alpha Zeta	University of Wisconsin–River Falls
Alpha Eta	Delaware Valley College of Science & Agriculture, Doylestown, Pa.
Alpha Theta	Iowa State University, Ames
Alpha Iota	Texas Tech University, Lubbock
Alpha Kappa	Mississippi State University, Mississippi State
Alpha Lambda	Florida A&M University, Tallahassee
Alpha Mu	Temple University, Philadelphia, Pa.
Alpha Nu	Utah State University, Logan

Table 3. Fellows of Pi Alpha Xi.

Member	Chapter (member no.)	Year awarded
Lewis Charles “Chad” Chadwick	Alpha (51)	1989 (deceased)
G.H. “Gus” Poesch	Delta (10)	1989 (deceased)
Roy A. Larson	Alpha (339)	1992
James B. Shanks	Epsilon (70)	1992
Harold Wilkins	Beta (162)	1992
Elwood “Woody” Kalin	Delta (48)	1993 (deceased)
Lou Berninger	Delta (15)	1994
Marlin N. Rogers	Alpha (319)	1994
James E. Klett	Epsilon (394)	1995
Kenneth C. Sanderson	Alpha (305)	1995
Dennis J. Wolnick	Gamma (323)	1995
John R. Culbert	Beta (72)	1998 (deceased)
Marvin C. Carbonneau	Beta (155)	1998
Robert W. Langhans	Zeta (68)	2000
Terri L. Ferriss	Chi (12)	2000

Manual, now in its eighth edition (PAX, 1998, 2002a).

Photography contest

The annual photography contest is open to PAX and ASHS members and held in conjunction with the ASHS annual conference. The annual contest, conceived by Dr. Richard Criley, the University of Hawaii (Honolulu), contributes to the goals of PAX by bringing students, faculty members and industry professionals together (PAX, 1996). Entries are displayed in the same hall as the research posters. Proceeds from the contest help support the PAX Scholarship Program (see the *Scholarship Program* section). Participants may enter 20.3 × 25.4 cm (8 × 10 inches) or 21.6 × 30.5 cm (8.5 × 12 inches) photographs in three categories: flower (a flower, flowers, flower parts, or a flower arrangement), ornamental [an ornamental plant(s), foliage, branches, berries, buds or combinations], and landscape (a landscape or interiorscape scene with plants as the principal focus; with or without people). The contest is announced in the ASHS newsletter each year, generally one to three months in advance of the annual ASHS conference. Contest rules are posted on the PAX web site (PAX, 2000e). Judges are selected by the PAX National vice president in consultation with faculty members of the host institution. Either ASHS members or local professional photographers are asked to serve.

PAX fellows

The inaugural class of Fellows was inducted at the 1989 annual business meeting of PAX National. The Fellows Award (Table 3) “is given to [PAX] members who have achieved marked service or excellence in the field of Floriculture, Landscape Horticulture, or Ornamental Horticulture and/or distinguished themselves with meritorious service to [PAX]” (PAX, 2000a). No more than twenty-five of the living membership of PAX shall be elected as Fellows. Nominations are due three months before the annual PAX business meeting held in conjunction with the ASHS annual conference.

Scholarship program

At the 1995 annual business meeting held in Montréal, Que., Canada, PAX members approved the establishment of a program to provide match-

ing funds for local chapters' scholarships. The goal of the PAX National Scholarship Program, by providing some matching dollars, is to encourage chapters to provide scholarships to deserving students. PAX National provides matching funds annually up to \$100 to each active chapter for support of a scholarship. Full procedures are available from the PAX web site (PAX, 2002f).

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