

By Myron Love

Growers who attended the most recent SGGA and SVGA conference (November 12-14 at the Travelodge in Saskatoon) had nothing but praise for the organization, the choice of speakers and the variety of exhibitors.

Owen Vanstone (Vanstone Nurseries in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba), for example, says that it was nice to see some new exhibitors this year. “The traffic seemed good,” he says. “And I have to compliment Dorothy (Long) for her work in organizing the conference. She seemed to have the details well in hand.”

Stuart Hunt from Oyen Greenhouses in Alberta says that he comes to the conference every couple of years. It seemed to Hunt that the number of exhibitors had grown from the last time he attended in 2007. He also noted that the conference seemed to be well organized.

Bob Purton (Kangro Gardening in Yorkton) observed that the conference gives him an opportunity to get together with other growers and compare experiences. “I always look forward to going to the trade show, too,” he says. “I always find something new.”

One of the features of this year’s conference that was new was that the SGGA and the SVGA welcomed two new partners – Flowers Canada and Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation. To reflect the expanded base, the conference this year was renamed the Saskatchewan Green Trades Conference – the largest conference and trade show of its kind in Saskatchewan.

The conference program began with two pre-conference workshops – led by Dr. Mohyuddin Mirza (recently retired from the Alberta Government) - speaking about getting started in the greenhouse industry – and customer service strategist and author Jeff Mowatt sharing low-cost high-return methods to retain employees and motivate them to provide exceptional service.

Mowatt, who also led a general session providing tips on how to put customers at ease, was the speaker most frequently mentioned by growers attending the conference. Tyler Benefeld, who works for Dutch Growers in Regina, said that he was most impressed with Mowatt while Bob Purton (Kangro Gardening, Yorkton) appreciated his positive approach.

Priscilla Mah (Central Botanical Gardens in Saskatoon) thought that Mowatt was the best speaker. She also appreciated hearing from Ball Horticultural’s Jim Nau about new varieties, container usage and propagation of perennials.

Other speakers on the greenhouse side were Dr. David Ehret of Agriculture and Agri-Foods Canada who did presentations on growing organic greenhouse crops, automated crop management and “Oxygenation of nutrient solutions”; Dr. Nabi Chaudhary of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, who spoke about the economics of greenhouse crop development and how to make your greenhouse more profitable; Syngenta’s Heidi Doering who provided suggestions on taking care of vegetative annuals and increasing sales and profit on bedding plants by paying attention to cultural details; Dr. Peter Johnston-Beresford from Olds College with an overview of new technologies to improve growing conditions for spring crops; Johnston-Beresford’s Olds colleague Dr. Ken Fry – whose topics were integrated pest management for greenhouse vegetable production and new species threatening urban forests (for the Parks and Recreation folks); Bob Brad of the University of Saskatchewan describing a university dehumidification project; Brian Sim of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture

providing an overview of agriculture business development programs; and marketing expert Bill McCurry.

For vegetable growers, University of Saskatchewan plant sciences researcher Dr. Doug Waterer reported on his department's experiments with a variety of vegetables over this past challenging summer as well as Dr. Philip Northover, supervisor of the Crop Protection lab in Regina, outlining the lab's services, and biologist (University of Regina) Dr. Chris Yost reporting on research into detecting fecal contamination levels in irrigation waters the Qu'Appelle valley.

The Parks and Green Spaces component of the conference also featured (in addition to Fry), presentations by Vancouver-based applied ecologist and renewable resources technologist Andrew Appleton and Chet Neufeld, the executive director of the non-profit Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan. The conference also included the SVGA and SGGA AGMs and a banquet at which four greenhouses Central Botanical Gardens and Cory Parke Greenhouses in Saskatoon, Shaunavon Greenhouses (in Shaunavon) and Dieter Martin Greenhouse (in Langham) – were awarded their 25 year pins. A silent auction that was part of the banquet evening raised over \$5500 dollars which will be used for SGGA's research and marketing programs.

"We had a very successful banquet and fundraiser," conference co-ordinator Dorothy Long reports.

She adds that attendance this year was over 200 – up from last year - while the number of exhibitors was 40 this year which was up from last year. Long along with the planning committee are very pleased with the results of the conference and trade show and is eagerly looking forward to next year's conference.