

Judges Sharpen Skills At Fair Convention

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HERSHEY (Lancaster Co.) — The Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs and the Pennsylvania State Showmen's Association recently conducted their 90th annual convention at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, Hershey.

The four-day conference, attended by nearly 1,600 people, provided educational seminars and roundtable discussions.

Part of the convention included a Judges' School, where approximately 100 participants had the opportunity to brush up on their skills or learn more about a particular subject. Participants included "people who want to learn to judge," said Annie Clark, Whitneyville, who assisted Bev Gruber in organizing the event.

"They chose two judging categories and go to two sessions. Most of them are getting certified for the first time. They usually try to pick an area of particular interest. Subjects included vegetables; quilting and needlework; nuts, fruits, and berries; flowers; art; crocheting and knitting; photography; and crafts and ceramics.

Claudia Payne, retired from the Maryland Cooperative Extension and now a consultant, opened the day.

"I've been reading reports and watching the news and listening to experts," she said. "One of the trends that we need to be aware of is that families and individuals will stay closer to home in 2002, that they will attend places within a short drive from their home.

"2002 will be a banner year for fairs. This is the time for you to realize that you're really on track. You have a chance to plan and make sure you do have a banner year, that you take that opportunity."

Expect larger crowds, new exhibitors and increased and improved security, she said.

Payne also recommended adding educational demonstrations, such as sewing machines, in the exhibit area. In addition the judging standards should be posted or leaflets for fair-goers to take home and perhaps enter next year.

Bonny Broadt, Bloomsburg, taught the flowers course. "The

hardest part is taking an exhibit out of its class," she said. Broadt recommended that stewards and assistants be well versed in the flower classes to help enter the exhibits in the correct class.

In addition helpers "are encouraged to listen to the judge's comments," she said. Stewards will probably be standing by the exhibit when the public comes to the fair, so they can answer more questions more intelligently if they have listened to the judge.

Judges should first look for contagious diseases, instincts, artificial support and artificial flowers, she said. Also, recently-potted flowers may also be disqualified at fairs since they tend to wilt quickly, "which makes the overall show look bad," she said.

One way to begin evaluations is to first make sure the correct number of flowers are present.

"Even nicer-looking flowers will take second place to vases if they don't have the right amount of flowers," she said.

"A seed catalog is a wonderful source to learn about flowers and plants, what they should look like," she said. "Use it as a reference in your own mind — it has all the pictures of what is what, and what each flower should ideally look like," she said.

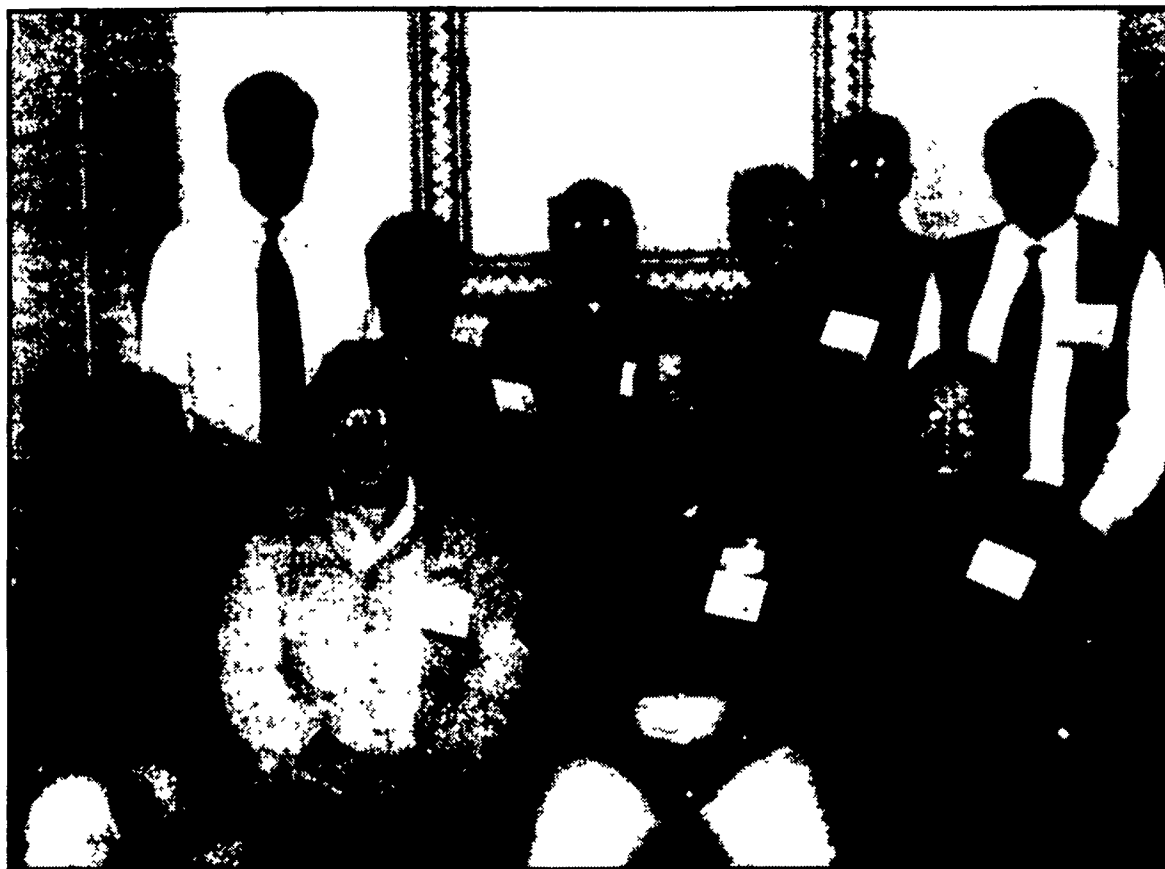
Donald Jackson, Red Lion, along with Tucker Hill and Jay Book, instructed the fruits, nuts, and berries class.

"As soon as you see a nut mature and fall off the tree, pick it up and take care of it to keep anything on the ground from invading it," he said. This also keeps excess moisture from causing mold on the nut.

As for fruits, Jackson said that "to maintain high quality blueberries, do a study on fertilizer and pH needs," he said. Entries such as persimmons and pecans may also begin showing up as fair exhibits, since they can be grown here," he said.

Displays should be educational, said Jay Book, Elizabethtown. He used the example of a display showcasing collecting, shelling, and storing black walnuts that he has exhibited at fairs.

An exhibit should have a title and several points to keep the public's interest. "If we're going to have an educational exhibit be educational, we have to be concise," he said.



Instructed the various segments of the annual Judges' School were, from left, Tom Burke, Allentown; Fay Fulmer, Nazareth; John Herbert, Gettysburg; Rainy Linn, Franklin; Donald Jackson, Red Lion; George Perry, Virginville; Howard Hoch, Oley; Susan Hahn, Pen Argyl; Jay Book, Elizabethtown; and Bonny Broadt, Bloomsburg.

Book also added that fruits such as plums must be firm so that they can be displayed for the duration of the fair without becoming unappetizing. Fruit should have a consistent appearance and be without blemishes. "One should look like the other," he said.

Leaders of the class advised that judges crack the nuts to determine if there is mold inside the nut.

In the quilting and needlework class instructed by Rainy Linn, Franklin, participants evaluated stuffed animals, counted cross stitch items, dolls, pillows, quilts, and needlepoint.

They evaluated creativity, as in using printed on, rather than created, quilt patterns, in their final placings.

Fay Fulmer, Nazareth, instructor of the crocheting and knitting session, taught the participants of the class to make sure the garment is clean before judging begins. This may not only show the exhibitor's standard of excellence but may also be a clue as to the

true age of the exhibit.

Also, machine knit items should be judged separately from hand knit items, said Fulmer.

"Make sure the seams are as flat as possible. Make sure there are no knots showing," she said.

In addition, an exhibit that is blocked, or carefully laid flat and stretched to dry, should take precedence in placings. "You'll know it when you see it by the way it lays," she said.

In sewn items, bands should be elastic and go back. "One thing that I'm a stickler for is colors," she said. "If you have two afghans and they're both done very well, go with the one with colors that are a little more pleasing."

Susan Hahn, Pen Argyl, was the instructor of the crafts and ceramics class.

The first consideration in the construction of any article is function, according to Hahn. What any object will be used for is the determining factor as the artist selects materials and decides on shape and color.

For example, decorations need to be in scale or proportion to the objects they decorate. Also, color should coordinate with the design.

In addition, all parts of a design should not be of equal interest but draw the eye to a highlight. Hahn's judging sheet included a checklist of: good use of design elements, creative use of material, materials appropriate for intended use, quality of workmanship, and degree of difficulty.

Tom Burke, Allentown, emphasized clarity, focal point, and emotional contact with the pictures in the art session.

Since the pieces will be displayed to the fair-goers, judges should keep in mind also the public's perception in placing the pictures, he said.

"It should be a celebration of people, really, something they can look at, enjoy, empathize with, and relate to."

A published photograph should not be the subject of a painting, said Burke.

"When you are looking at artwork, there is a formal language involved. Does this set you on a journey? Does it have a starting and an ending point? Does it make you eye go to one place?"

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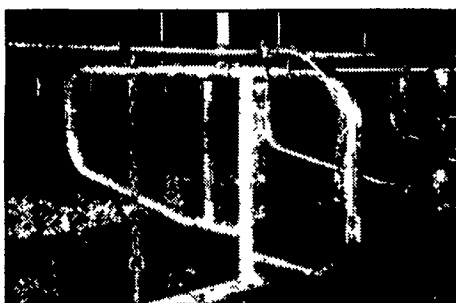
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