THE C&SSA EDITORS' EXCHANGE

Dedicated to enhancing the production and role of newsletters in cactus and succulent societies

Vol. 1, No. 1, February, 1992

Co-editors:

W. McMaster Clarke,  
3947 Harrison Pike West,  
Cleveland, TN 37311

William J. Felts,  
2305 NW 111th  
Oklahoma City, OK 73120

AN EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE

The idea for this newsletter originated at the welcoming party for the 1991 C&SSA convention in San Antonio, when some editors talked informally with Mary Jo Gussett. This contact led to a luncheon meeting of all editors present, where each introduced her- or himself and told a little of accomplishments and problems. At the end of that session, we two agreed to test the idea of a newsletter for editors, aimed at "enhancing the production and role of newsletters in cactus and succulent societies". Certainly, many of you edit a better newsletter than this one! But are there any of us who couldn't use a little advice, some new ideas, or just the encouragement that comes from hearing from others with the same problems we have, and how they dealt with them?

At the meeting in San Antonio, a number of advantages of the Editors' Exchange were conceived. First of all —except where several societies are in close proximity— newsletter editors are rather isolated, with little or none of the peer-contact that fosters innovation and improvement of skill and style. A forum for exchange of ideas on format and production methods might well raise the quality of (and the joy of producing) newsletters across the country. Second, and aside from matters mechanical, we concluded that we could learn much from one another about stimulating or increasing input from members of our societies, and better serving those members. Thirdly, we considered the possibility of making available —especially to editors having few local contributors— articles of interest to C&S hobbyists.

We left the convention with a plenty of zeal, and the realization that we never will know if the idea "works" unless we try it! This preliminary issue is being mailed to all editors we could identify. (Our thanks to Eleanor Barker for the C&SSA list and to Carol Wujcik for that in the Huntington Library.) It has the rudiments of what we hope to have in future quarterly issues: an editorial or editors' report and one or more articles relating to "newslettering". Whether publication continues depends on you, our fellow editors.

As you know so well, it is one thing to grind out a newsletter for a passive membership, and quite another to have on-going input from readers, in reality, contributing editors. We will need your cooperation in a number of ways, ranging from completing questionnaires, to helping to answer questions submitted by other editors, to writing brief articles on how you do things, or wish they were done. Are you interested in working with us in this effort? If so, please write to either of the editors. We'll be back in touch when we've studied your responses.

We wish to thank the Board of Directors of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America for their generous expression of interest in our effort: the funding the first year of this newsletter.
Editing a newsletter can be exciting or a drudge depending on how you go about it. Careful planning in advance can take the drudgery out of it and leave the fun in. Here are a few ideas.

The first step in editing any publication is to identify your mission. Why are you publishing this newsletter? What is its purpose? Spelling out specific goals and objectives will help you later to decide what topics you want to cover and how you want to present them. For most newsletters, the mission is fairly clear: to communicate news and information to members of an organization with a specific interest. But looking deeper into why the newsletter is important to the organization and what role it plays will give you more direction as you plan each issue of your newsletter.

The second step, equally important, is identifying your audience. Who are your readers? Why do they pick up your newsletter and what will it take to make them keep reading? Thinking about who you are writing for will help you determine the style and tone — or "voice" — of your newsletter, as well as its content. If, for example, most of your readers are busy professional people who can't spend much time perusing a newsletter — despite their interest in your topic — you may choose to edit your newsletter so that articles are short, tight, and contain the bare facts with few colorful sidelights; formats are standard from one issue to the next, and regular features are located in about the same place in every issue so they can be found easily. If, on the other hand, your readers have more time, you may want to adopt a narrative, chatty, reader-friendly style that allows you to delve more deeply into a subject and use humor or a lighthearted tone. You also may be able to experiment more with different formats and have more freedom in choosing where to put your articles.

Once the "big picture" has been addressed, choose the specific style you want. Pick a style manual, e.g., Strunk & White or The Associated Press Stylebook — that fits your goals and your audience. Adhere to the manual's rules fairly closely, but feel free to fit it to your special circumstances. You may want to develop your own style manual for writers or future editors. The overriding objective is consistency. Once you decide how to spell, punctuate or abbreviate something, stick to it. And don't forget to keep your publication's "voice" in mind. Different authors write in different voices. Most editors try to keep as much of the author's personality in an article as possible without silencing the overall "voice" of the publication.

When you edit articles, keep them as tight as your style calls for. Get rid of unnecessary words or phrases. (Use 'To save time' instead of 'In an effort to save time'. Use 'Recognizing' instead of 'In recognition of'.) Use action verbs whenever you can. (Use 'the bird sang louder' instead of 'the bird's singing became louder'.) Most important, make sure the article sticks to the point. The premise or primary point should be in the first paragraph, and details that support it or add interest should follow. A standard journalism model is the "inverted triangle". Put the most important facts — who, what, where, when, why, how — early in the article and add details in descending order of importance. When you need to cut an article later to fit your layout, you'll find it easier to cut from the bottom and not worry about losing any vital information. If there's room, a concluding paragraph can sum up the article.

Paragraphs should have smooth transitions so the reader doesn't have to change thought gears suddenly. The article should be well organized so that each point flows naturally from the one before. Giving authors a rough outline of the article in advance can help them organize the article as they write it.
Which brings us to assigning articles to authors. Depending on the size of your newsletter, you probably will seek articles and features from others. Let the author know your objectives for the article and for the newsletter as a whole. Tell him how you envision its organization, but give him enough rein to encourage creativity and independent thought. Suggest sources of information if possible. When the article comes in, don't be afraid to edit. Review it by reading it through once. Does it accomplish its mission? Is it interesting? Does it instruct or inform? Is it relevant to your audience? Is it well organized? Does it have enough or too much detail? Is it credible? Cut out any fluff or repetition.

Tailor the article to your style and "voice" without eclipsing the author's personality. This is a difficult task, but one experience teaches. If you're starting a new newsletter or revamping an established one, spend some time thinking about the layout. Of course, your budget dictates a lot of what you can do, but creativity and careful planning are just as important. Make the design fit your audience. Do you want short, newsy items mixed with one or two longer "feature" articles, or will you stick with all short or all long articles? Determine where your regular features, such as meeting announcements or news about readers, will appear: first page, last page, near the front, near the back. Then stick to it so readers can find the regular items easily. Think about how you can draw readers into the newsletter. For example, if you don't put your biggest, most interesting feature on the front page, perhaps you will use a "reefer" line, letting readers know what's inside and where to find it. Or you can include an "Inside This Issue" box on the front of every issue.

Think about each issue of your newsletter as early as possible. Consider how much space you have available and how much copy you will need. Assign your articles early so you'll have time to work on them. Keep a supply of "fillers" on hand in case there are holes as you fit your copy to the layout. Some filler ideas might be important club phone numbers, one- or two-sentence fun facts, meeting dates or your address so readers can write in.

Good planning and a clear idea of what you want to achieve with your newsletter is the key to creating a successful publication that your readers look forward to receiving. But don't forget to have fun putting your newsletter together...and let it show!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Marcia is Assistant News Director of the National Association of Realtors and Associate Editor of Realtor News, circulation about 700,000 readers. She was previously Editor of Unique Homes magazine. She does freelance real estate writing for magazines such as Regardie's. She is also mother of Mac's 2 year old grandson.

OUR MAILING LIST: On the front page we acknowledged the origins of our mailing list. We thought you might be interested in its demographics. There are addresses in 25 states, two Canadian provinces, Australia and India. Actually, the Mexican address is that of our Journal editor, Charles Glass, who is interested in our project.

As expected, California has by far the highest count, 22, with one of those being Eleanor Barker, C&SSA newsletter editor, who also is interested in our project. There are two in: AZ, MD, NJ, NV, NY, OK and TX. The single-newsletter states are: AR, CO, CT, FL, HI, IA, KS, KY, LA, MI, MO, NE, NM, OR, UT, WA, and WI.
Photographs, especially of members and speakers, are popular in newsletters, but many newsletters don't have many. Your readers are almost always pleased to see themselves, friends, or their plants in the newsletter. They often enjoy seeing people they don't know with a name attached. "Oh, that's Nancy, the Notocactus expert! And that's her Noto that swept the show!"

If dismal reproduction quality, particularly of people, inhibits your use of pictures in your newsletter, perhaps the techniques I've developed will help you. I've learned over the years what to do and what not to do, but results will always be uncertain with the photocopy machines of today. But copiers have improved and are continuing to do so. So if you have a copyable photo, have access to a good copying machine, and do it right, you can improve your newsletter. I know that if you have the luxury of a good scanner/computer/printer you don't have to photocopy photographs, but I've never had that luxury.

FIND COPYABLE PHOTOS!

- Color photos reproduce as well as black and white, and are more desirable afterwards. A slightly overexposed photo will reproduce better than a darker one.

- Faces are especially critical, must not be in shadow, subject should be facing the camera, and should be closeup. You want people, not the background.

- Action photos and portraits — both are fine, especially with plants or club activities in the background. Photos of members as babies are fun — and these old photos often reproduce well.

- Plant photos are the easiest to photocopy, although I prefer line drawings and turn of the century woodblock illustrations. They copy more clearly. Habitat shots may have a problem with the sky. Some photocopiers fail to reproduce blue well, so clouds may not be defined. People and plants together make great shots.

- When you are the photographer, TAKE LOTS OF SHOTS! Bracket exposures. Experiment to find best film speeds, etc for indoor shots. If it is an important event, recruit another photographer.

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO KNOW IF A PHOTO WILL COPY WELL. TEST IT!

- Test all your possible photos on any copier with a light setting. You will be amazed that the best looking photo will usually not reproduce best. YOU MUST TEST IT. Why? Lines on peoples faces, teeth, shading on flower petals, and many other details change unpredictably when copied. Even a poor test machine can indicate the best pictures to try on a good machine. FIND A GOOD COPIER

- Can you use any copier for photos? NONONONO! The irony — paradox — frustration- is that the machine that is best for text, e.g., the big Xerox which never shows cut and paste lines, is poor for photos. A good photo machine shows all the nuances. Shop around! I go to to a stationery store with two such copiers, both big IBM, Series 3, different vintages.
- If you can find a good copier where they will let you make your own copies, thank the heavens and everyone else! Alas, I must surrender the copy and layout I've slaved over to idiots who DON'T CARE LIKE I CARE! A A A R R R G G G H H H H! I prefer places where they let me stand there and make helpful "suggestions". Needless to say the irritation factor is high on both sides. I try to be enthusiastic, tell them how important photos are to the readers and especially the subjects. Often empathy is created, even with the idiots!

DO IT RIGHT, DON'T FORGET THE LITTLE DETAILS

- Can you lay out your page, make a master copy, touch it up, and then photocopy the photocopy? NO WAY! You will lose far too much detail. You can cut and paste to layout all the text leaving space for these photos, and make a master, retouch cut and paste lines, etc, then affix the photos to that master. Use rubber cement.

- Sometimes I doctor photos. I crop beer bellies, sagging arms, etc. Sometimes I fill in bright sunspots (distracting). This ruins the photo but may save egos. Use color of the same degree of darkness as the surroundings. It need not be the same color since the product is in black and white. Outdoor shots usually have some light areas around the edge, eg the sky. Use a felt tip on the edge of the photo (not on the face of the photo) or draw a line on the paper to avoid an 'edgeless' look to the copy.

- Place each page on the copier glass by hand. Make some final tests to get the darkness setting right. Lighter usually is better for the photos. Do the back-to-back process carefully. You theoretically have a 50/50 chance to get it right, but extensive tests show an actual probability of 95/5 against, particularly if you are not doing it yourself.

- Give the photographer credit!

SUMMARY:

The key word is TEST. Test potential photos in advance. Test the finished made-up page. With practice, you will learn which photos and which machines work best for you. Don't expect perfection, especially in photo reproduction. You may cringe at the result compared to the photo but your readers won't have comparison photos. Go with it!!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Many of you have exchanged newsletters with Carol. She has been producing the Long Beach Cactus Club Newsletter for 8 years. She put out the South Coast newsletter and a bromeliad society newsletter until full time work and a 3 hour commute got in the way. Before moving to CA she put out C&SS of South FL newsletter. Now husband Joe is co-editor with Carol and she is incredibly grateful.

Regarding the cover sheet: Editors Lynn and Lowilla Wilson of Tulsa called B.F., inquiring about our mailing list, needed to tell you editors about the June C&S conference in Tulsa. The list was sent to the Wilsons, but rather than use a blank outer sheet, we are using their announcement.
THE CASE FOR A "NEWS SERVICE"

by Bill Felts

As editor of OFFSET, the newsletter for the small Central Oklahoma C&S Society, I serve some very nice people who primarily grow and show, and generally cannot be coerced to write about their special interests, areas of expertise and experiences. Information of this nature (rather than abstracts from readily available books) is what I believe should be in a newsletter, as the "meat" on the bare bones of society news and meeting notices. As an editor, I find the situation very frustrating, but my greater concern is that our new, developing members are deprived of local accumulations of knowledge, except for a few minutes each month, and during occasional visits to older members.

Many of you must have the same problem. I believe the EDITORS' EXCHANGE could provide a partial solution. What I've been thinking about (and alluded to in our editorial) is a very modest C&S version of the news (or wire) services that collect and distribute newsworthy stories and information to the print and electronic media!

In the few newsletters with which I exchange, the quality of occasional articles on plant biology, culture methods, local plant distributions and related topics --by scientifically trained or simply well-read and experienced members-- is most impressive. (Even I can be lucky at times! This month a new member, a research biochemist, will talk on cacti, succulents and genetic engineering, and is writing for the newsletter.) These articles have external distribution only through the editor's exchanges with a few other editors. What I am suggesting is, in effect, a nation-wide exchange of material other than club news items. We would receive copies of one- or two-page articles from your newsletter and distribute them broadly (with credits). I suspect that at least half the editors in the country could supply one or two articles annually, and, in doing so, might actually stimulate writers by offering a broader audience.

This service should not pose any real threat of duplications within the regional newsletter exchanges. Once each editor has accumulated a file of articles, the chance of all newsletters in an exchange group publishing the same material at once would be quite small. Duplication occurs now, of course, without ill effect, for exchanged newsletters are enjoyed for general news, meeting schedules, humor, etc., as well as for educational or informative material.

I look forward to your reactions to this proposal. (The editors have thick skins, and will greatly appreciate your input.)

TECHNICAL NOTE: Word processor used for this newsletter: IBM 30 286 with Word Perfect 5.0. Printer: Hewlett Packard Laserjet III. Fonts: for masthead, CG Times (scalable), 20 pts. and 12 pts.; for all articles except the "News Service", the same 12 pts.; for the exception and footnotes/fillers, Univers (scalable), 12 pts. Copier: Ricoh.
WHAT'S IN A NEWSLETTER?
by Mac Clarke

Would you like some new ideas on how to edit a better newsletter? Who wouldn't! We hope that the results of this survey will show what your fellow editors think a newsletter should be like. They will if enough of you return your answers to me: W M Clarke, 3947 Harrison Pike West, Cleveland TN 37311. The results will appear in a future issue.

You will probably need additional paper to answer the questions. We can't afford much white space on our budget! Thanks!

Purpose:

100. Why do you publish a newsletter? (club news, education ?)
110. For whom you publish it for? (members, exchange editors ?)

Contents: (please tell, in this order, how often, how much of issue does it occupy, and \vi applicable list some recent specific subjects)

200. Meeting notices
205. Dues notices
210. Business meeting news
215. Officer and committee chair lists
220. Plant of Month (what does that include?)
225. Plant descriptions
230. How-to articles
235. Habitat travelogues
240. Question and Answer columns
245. Biographies
250. Obituaries
255. Sunshine (birthdays, recuperation, etc)
260. Editorials
265. Photos
270. Drawings, cartoons, and other art
275. Paid advertising
280. Other articles

Source of contents (give approximate % of each, totaling near 100%):

300. Editor
310. Member authors
320. Exchange newsletters
330. Others (Who?)

Art and Photos:

340. Members
350. Others (Who?)
Layout:

400. Page size
405. Paper size
410. Both sides of page?
415. Number of columns (this newsletter has 1)
420. Mailer page?
425. Logo?
430. Fancy fonts? (which and where)
440. Would you please include a copy of a recent issue?

Production:

500. Is your newsletter printed, photocopied, or what?
510. If not printed, how do you prepare copy? (typewriter, computer)
520. If computer, word processor or desk top publisher? Name?
530. If computer, what kind of printer for master copy?
540. How much time do you spend on a typical issue?
550. What is out of pocket cost of one copy of a typical issue?
560. Cost breakdown?
570. Who pays for it? (you, the club, other)
580. How many copies are made of a typical issue? Where do they go

Your Biography:

600. How long have you been editing your current newsletter(s)?
610. How long has the newsletter been published?
620. Have you any previous experience or training in editing?
630. Do you enjoy it?
THE 4th BIENNIAL
MID-STATES
STICK TOGETHER
TULSA 1992
SAT. & SUN. JUNE 20-21, 1992

SPEAKERS
GROUP DISCUSSIONS
SHOW MID-STATES CHAMPION CACTUS & SUCCULENTS
SALES SEVERAL GROWERS FROM PAST CONVENTIONS
PLANT AUCTION TAX DEDUCIBLE
GREENHOUSE VISITATIONS
BONZAI POIS 50% OFF AT RASNA'S IN LAKE ELSINORE
POINTS OF INTEREST ORAL ROBERTS-PRAYER TOWER & PRAYING HANDS,
GILCREASE & PHILBEROOG MUSEUMS, OUT-DOOR THEATRE AND MANY MORE

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING OR WANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, FILL OUT THE COUPON BELOW AND MAIL TO LYNN WILSON, 6811 S 230 E AV, BROKEN ARROW, OK 74014 OR CALL 918 357-2401.

NAME
ADDRESS
TELEPHONE
NUMBER IN YOUR PARTY
SURVEY ON "WHAT'S IN A NEWSLETTER?"

from Chuck Staples, Editor of the
Mid-Iowa Cactus & Succulent Society
May 1992

Purpose:

100. Why do you publish a newsletter? Club meetings, news & education.
110. For whom you publish it for? Primarily for local members; secondary, for
exchanges and subscribers. We also have a few honorary members or
organizations that get copies.

Contents: (please tell, in this order, how often, how much of issue does it
occupy, and where applicable list some recent specific subjects)

[Most articles are from 1/2 page to 1.5 pages. I prefer 1/2 to 1 page articles, but
don't want much more than 1.5 pages per article. If I get more than that, I will
split it between 2 or more issues.]

200. Meeting notices: Every issue — about a quarter page.
205. Dues notices: Once a year — plus a reminder — member & subscription cost
is on the back page of every issue.
210. Business meeting news: Every issue if had a business meeting — half page.
215. Officer and committee chair lists: Every issue lists officers — quarter
page — committee chairs as needed.
220. Plant of Month (what does that include?): Most issues cover this — usually
one cactus and one other succulent. Point system is given for the first 4
in each category — 4 for 1st place, etc. — included in meeting notices.
225. Plant descriptions: Most issues cover plant of month descriptions — about
a half page per plant with picture if possible. Members will from time to
time do articles on plant descriptions.
230. How-to articles: Some issues — depends on author.
235. Habitat travelogues: Some issues.
240. Question and Answer columns: We tried this for a couple recent years, but
without questions from other members, this column died — it was from 1 to 2
pages long.
245. Biographies: Some issues — from 1/2 to 1 page.
250. Obituaries: None so far.
255. Sunshine (birthdays, recuperation, etc): No birthdays, but news on anyone
who is recuperating from an illness. I personally keep this all to a
minimum a/c I feel primary purpose of newsletter is to inform and educate
about our plant hobby.
260. Editorials: Every issue — from 1/4 to 1.5 page — whatever is left after all
the articles. This is the newsy portion of the newsletter.
265. Photos: Every issue — as much as possible to break up the written words —
these could cover anywhere up to 1/2 page.
270. Drawings, cartoons, and other art: I have a daughter that does drawings and
art work for me — not many cartoons, just once in a while if I find someone
talented in that area. Drawings could cover from 1/4 to 1/2 page.
275. Paid advertising: None — not appropriate as far as I am concerned in
putting out a local newsletter.
280. Other articles: None that are not connected to the c&s hobby. Other
articles are just not appropriate in a c&s hobby.
Source of contents (give approximate % of each, totalling near 100%):

300. Editor: 15%.
310. Member authors: 75%.
320. Exchange: 5%.
330. Others (Who?): 5% from subscribers.

Art and Photos:

340. Members: Photos - very little art.
350. Others (Who?): Art from a daughter - very little from anyone else.

Layout:

400. Page size: Approx 6 1/2 to 7" by 9.
405. Paper size: 8" by 11".
410. Both sides of page: Yes.
415. Number of columns (this newsletter has 1): Depends on how much material I have to produce and how many pages I plan to print. Part of the newsletter will be in 2 columns and part 1 column. I mix it up.
420. Mailer page? No. I include page #s and club initials & issue # & year of every issue on each page.
425. Logo? You betcha — one that my daughter developed for our club.
430. Fancy fonts? (which and where): Very seldom to none.
440. Would you please include a copy of a recent issue? You have copies & the latest issue is attached.

Production:

500. Is your newsletter printed, photocopied, or what? Photocopied.
510. If not printed, how do you prepare copy? (typewriter, computer): I use a Smith Corona word processing typewriter (XD 7500 with a spell-right dictionary).
520. If computer, word processor or desk top publisher? Name? See 510.
530. If computer, what kind of printer for master copy? N/A.
540. How much time do you spend on a typical issue? I really don't know. I'd say 20 to 30 hours per month.
550. What is out of pocket cost of one copy of a typical issue? 61c for an 8 page issue.
560. Cost breakdown? Photocopy cost: 4c x 8 pages = 32c.
      Stamp cost: 29c.
570. Who pays for it? (you, the club, other): The club. I have an annual budget of $450 to produce the newsletter.
580. How many copies are made of a typical issue? 65
      Where do they go? 20 to active members (including married couples).
      16 to subscribers.
      19 to exchanges.
      6 to honorary.
      Courtesy copies to 1 or 2 per month as needed.
Your Biography:

600. How long have you been editing your current newsletter(s)? About 12 years. I dropped out a couple years in the mid 80s.
610. How long has the newsletter been published? About 14 years.
620. Have you any previous experience or training in editing? No.
630. Do you enjoy it? Yes, as long as I get articles and other material from members and other parties. I enjoy putting it together.