

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

As an association of judges we are committed to representing the good, welfare and education of dog show judges in America. We are also committed to the advancement of purebred dogs.

We often pursue objectives which address the good or the welfare of judges. If we can make our members' lives more comfortable, convenient or easier, we will certainly try to do so. This is only a legitimate undertaking for us so long as the particular objective we pursue is not in conflict with our commitment to purebred dogs. For example, it would be wrong for us to lobby the AKC to hand out breed-judging approvals just for the asking. While a few might think this is a fine idea, it would be contrary to our collateral obligations. On the other hand, certain objectives merit our highest priority and our greatest effort because they combine our commitment to both our members' needs and the advancement of purebred dogs.

Such is clearly the case when the objective is the enhancement of judges education. No one in the sport can reasonably deny the close relationship between the education of our judges and the future of our breeds. For this reason the ADSJ cannot simply forget about the discontinuation of the in-ring observer program. It offered a unique learning opportunity that can not be had with any of the other approved educational components.

In the last issue of *The Voice* a revised in-ring observer program was proposed which included suggestions that could greatly reduce, if not completely eliminate, the types of abuse which have often been cited as justification for the demise of the program. Those judges who would so abuse a valuable educational tool that it is lost to all, are much like exhibitors who trash hotel rooms to the extent that the hotel no longer accepts dogs. They should be disciplined. In this regard the AKC has been somewhat remiss, which has only invited further abuse.

Nonetheless, I believe the AKC board was a bit hasty in ordering the termination of the in-ring program without first attempting to solve the problems associated with it. This abrupt action displayed a lack of appreciation on the part of some board members for the significant educational value that the program had to offer. In this instance, it also evidenced a disregard for the views of our members.

We have been told that the termination came as a result of complaints about the program from some unnamed "high profile judges". If we didn't

know better we might think that offering this as a reason for canceling a program, favored by the overwhelming majority of our members, was intended as an insult to our organization. But honestly, I don't believe the insult was intentional. I don't think the staff realized they were telling us that the opinions of a handful of "high profile judges" should be given more weight than the collective view of the largest association of dog show judges in the country.

Speaking of high profile judges, I don't know of any judge who had a higher profile than the late Anne Rogers Clark, who in the December, 2006 issue of the AKC Gazette (page 18) wrote, "The in-ring observer program was a terrific learning tool...". It seems Anne, for one, appreciated the educational value of the program and supported the concept. She went on to say, "provided that the judge one observed was comfortable having someone else in the ring and did not find another's presence distracting to the job at hand."

I couldn't agree more. No judge should be forced, or in any way pressured, to take an in-ring observer if the judge does not feel comfortable with another person in the ring. One always had the right to simply opt out of the program. There is no shame in insisting upon maintaining the ring environment in which you feel you do your best work. But, for heaven's sake, don't snipe at a valuable program because you don't want to admit that you find it uncomfortable or distracting to have another person in your ring.

Also worth noting were Mrs. Clark's final comments on this subject. "Those of us who were comfortable serving as mentors with this program realized that you also learn by teaching. In all things, one learns by doing."

Amen.

As the AKC board elections near, it will be interesting to hear the candidates' views on this issue. We will continue to seek the return of a new and improved in-ring observer program with the hope that if an AKC board review of this matter is undertaken it will take into account the constructive suggestions offered in the Fall, 2006, issue of this newsletter.

(The first draft of this article was written before Anne Clark passed away. I was saddened to make the necessary changes, but glad to hear that some of her closest friends were with her when the end came.)