

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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“The AKC spends a fortune educating judges.” “Judges have been getting a free ride.” “It’s time for judges to give back to the sport.” “Judging fees are much too high.” Sound familiar? Of course, you have heard and read statements like these for too many years now. We have become so accustomed to hearing such rubbish that we hardly notice, let alone object. Oh, when we read or hear these comments, we may think, “This person really doesn’t have a clue.” What we fail to realize is that we foster such misconceptions through our silence. When these and other such statements are mindlessly repeated by people who should know better, and they go unchallenged, they become part of what the dog world thinks is common knowledge. As the old saying goes, “If you repeat a lie often enough, most people come to believe it.” The lies become accepted as fact! Taken together they create an anti-judge atmosphere that permeates the dog show world.

Within this context we can expect the rise of punitive, damaging and self-defeating policies. An Annual Fee for Judges is a prime example of such a policy. It is punitive and damaging to judges, it is damaging to clubs and ultimately an added cost to exhibitors. It is in this last regard that it is self-defeating, as it will contribute to the further decline in entries. However, rather than continue to attack this obviously flawed proposal, I want to address some of the underlying misconceptions which have spawned this misguided policy.

First, is the statement, “The AKC spends a fortune educating judges.” It is no doubt true that the AKC spends a great deal of money on the judges education programs that it produces, and if one adds the production of AKC educational materials, a proportionate share of the reps cost and administrative expenses, it comes to a tidy sum. However, this expenditure pales in comparison to what the judges themselves spend on their education. The AKC sets the requirements (components) which must be satisfied and it is up to the judges to satisfy them at their own expense. They must buy the breed books, videos, and now, even the breed standards. The judges must pay to travel around the country to attend national or regional specialty shows. They travel to judge matches, sweepstakes and even foreign assignments to get experience in new breeds. They travel to engage in ringside mentoring and sometimes they pay admission to do so. After all this travel do they get to stay and dine free of charge in an AKC Hotel? No, they pay hundreds of dollars per trip for

food and lodging while pursuing AKC educational requirements. The judges pay their own registration fees to attend institutes, seminars and judges workshops across the country. Judges spend many thousands of dollars to receive approval to judge a single group. The amount the AKC spends on judges education is a drop in the bucket compared to what judges collectively spend on education. So it is infuriating to those judges who spend so much time, effort and their hard earned money trying to satisfy AKC requirements, to hear the AKC complain about how much it costs AKC to educate judges.

Then there is the claim that, “Judges are getting a free ride.” See above, but also, along with ones’ educational expenses, there are many other expenses which must be borne by a judge. Expenses related to telephone, fax, e-mail and postage, record keeping, office supplies, a computer, printer, possibly a home office, association dues, special insurance (e.g. Medical Evacuation), wardrobe costs and dry-cleaning costs. Judges are photographed for national publications at every assignment. Some men may be able to get away with a somewhat limited wardrobe, but it can be a good bit costlier for the women. Heaven forbid if you should let down your fashion guard for a moment, as you may be publicly chastised by someone in the dog press.

It must be noted that none of the expenses mentioned, from one’s continuing education to one’s wardrobe, may be charged to a club as an expense item. These expenses come out of a judge’s fee. If the judge cannot charge a fee, then these are simply uncompensated expenses a judge must pay to continue to judge dogs. When, after decades of sacrifice in some cases, a judge may finally charge a fee, which may or may not be enough to cover all of these expenses, the judge is then subjected to the petty jealousies of the small-minded among us. These envy peddlers look only at the fee, as though this paltry sum was all profit. Even if it were, it would be in exchange for a days work, often under difficult conditions, to say nothing of the days lost to what has become the nightmare of air travel. More about fees later, but the “free ride” criticism is so contrary to fact that it is astonishing that anyone experienced in the dog show world would ever utter such nonsense, let alone repeat it.

With some types of criticism no rational response may be useful because it is obvious on the face of the criticism that rationality has been abandoned by the critic. The statement, “It’s time for judges to give back to the sport.”, is such a statement. It is so self-contradictory that it clearly falls below a threshold of rational discourse. No expenditure of breath or ink should be necessary to refute assertions

of this type. All we can do is to ask the critic to stop and think about what they are saying. Then we must hold on to the slender hope that rationality will return. Everyone in the dog show world ought to know that judges give back to the sport every time they step into the ring. Without their accumulated knowledge and judgment there would be no dog show sport.

If what is meant by this statement is that judges should contribute financially through additional fees, the way others in the sport have contributed, then the statement may be a bit of deceptive demagoguery. That is, while attempting to enlist the support of other segments of the sport, the real message is, "It is time for the clubs and exhibitors to make additional payments to the AKC."

Certain segments of the general dog world, some elements of the dog press, some AKC employees and it seems most of the AKC Board of Directors, may be quite unaware of the true costs and sacrifices judges make to achieve and maintain their positions as AKC judges. Of course, we are all ignorant of many things including some things of which we should be aware. While it can be frightening to realize that those at the helm may not be aware of certain essential matters, it is a challenge, it is not necessarily the end of our world. The uninformed can become informed. If however, they can not grasp the facts when presented, then we have a more serious problem.

The final statement that I wish to address, "Judging fees are much too high.", betrays an ignorance of the relationship between judging fees and inflation. It would be an eye-opening bit of research for someone with the time and inclination to do an honest study of this topic. It would require a statistically sufficient sampling of judges fees from forty or forty-five years ago to arrive at what was then the norm. Then apply the Consumer Price Index to these fees to see where judging fees would be today if they were not so held down as they have been.

Some of us have been involved in the sport long enough that we don't have to wait for such research to be done to know that judging fees have dramatically lost ground to inflation over the past four or five decades. Let me give you a couple of examples. I'm sure many of you who have been around for a while can come up with similar illustrations.

Back in the 1960s, I recall a fellow member standing up at a kennel club meeting and complaining about paying the \$400.00 fee for an all-breed judge from Texas. About the same time, friend of mine who was a single group judge from Columbus, Ohio, was charging \$125.00 plus expenses. Keep in mind that this was the mid-60s, a new car could be bought for

about \$4,000.00, a new home in the suburbs would set you back about \$25,000.00, a teacher's starting salary was a heady, \$6,000.00, a gallon of gas to get you to the local dog show, about \$0.24, and the entry fee for your dog, \$5.00. Now, in the year 2010, if a single group judge charged a fee of \$250.00, if a multiple group judge charged \$450.00 and if an all-breed judge charged \$800.00, they would be condemned by most in the sport as gougers. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves a few questions. Had judges not held down their fees out of concern for struggling kennel clubs (most judges are also club members) just what would those fees be today? What has been the average percentage of increase in every other aspect of our lives? What has been the average percentage of increase in every other aspect of a dog show? How then can any fair-minded person, given the facts, conclude that judges are paid too much today, especially when a large portion of their meager fees goes to pay their many uncompensated expenses? Judges are paid too much? As compared to what?

Forget inflation for a moment. Just consider the time, effort and expense it takes for a judge to arrive at the point where a fee is considered acceptable. Now compare this to just about any other profession, trade or occupation. Then compare the judge's compensation to compensation received in these other fields. One may begin to wonder why judges bother, but it is no secret. Judges, both those who charge a fee and those who do not, judge for the love of the sport. No one in their right mind would do it solely for the money. Although a small number of judges may rely on judging fees for their livelihood, many would just like to break even. If some judges earn a small supplement to their income through judging, what of it? The key word here is "earn", they work hard for it, and since when is a modest compensation for one's labor something for which one should be criticized? Why, after accumulating so much breed-specific knowledge, so many years, if not decades, of preparation and paying one's dues, should a judge be made to feel ashamed of earning a small supplemental income through judging. Indeed, there are some judges who charge a fee, yet lose more than they gain financially by taking time away from other endeavors which are much more financially rewarding than judging dogs will ever be. They pay that price because judging is their passion.

I have been told that the AKC has "pages of judges who are making \$40,000.00 per year judging dogs." From a non-judge's standpoint this may seem to be true, but it is doubtful that number takes into account the many costs referred to earlier. Furthermore, the \$40,000.00 figure suggest a judge with a \$400.00 fee judging 100 shows or more per

year. It is questionable whether the AKC official providing this information would want to trade places with such a judge. Life on the road is not as great as some may think. Living out of a suitcase, standing on concrete seven hours a day (or bumpy ground, which is worse) and contending with the state of air travel today, is enough to make one feel a bit sad for those folks so addicted to judging as to go through so much for their doggy fix. Imagine what it would be like to be judging that much if one did not love doing it, but rather, soldiered on trapped by financial circumstances.

To return to my initial point that we invite policies like an Annual Fee for Judges, when we fail to object to uninformed and fallacious statements about judges or judging. If we don't find the will to stand up to such statements, regardless of who makes them, we and the entire sport will pay a heavy price.