

President's Welcoming Address



Dr. Steve Blizzard

IDFTA Conference, Grand Rapids, Michigan, February 2001

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the 44th Annual Winter Meeting of the International Dwarf Fruit Tree Association. We are extremely pleased to be here at the Amway Grand Plaza in sunny Grand Rapids, Michigan. On behalf of myself and the board of directors, we welcome you to what promises to be an informative and diverse program and outstanding orchard tour. We want to thank the growers and the folks here in Michigan for their efforts and help designing these tours; Dr. Bruce Barritt, our Education Director, for the dynamic program; and to Charlie and Paulette Ax for the arrangements here at the Grand Plaza.

The year 2000 has been a bittersweet year for both our organization and the fruit industry. This marked the first time our winter meetings were held outside North America, with a highly successful meeting and tour in New Zealand for which we are eternally grateful to the growers and researchers of that country for their help in this undertaking and to the many folks in Australia for arranging and helping with the fantastic tour down under. On the other hand, this convention with low attendance reflects the state of affairs of our fruit industry, suffering from overproduction and thus low returns.

There are those who would say that organizations such as this are to blame for this overproduction, that they encourage efficiency in production without regard for its effect on the industry. If this were true, we should criticize or blame the automobile or tractor for putting the horse out of a job and thus the effects on the horse industry or the Salk vaccine and its cure of polio for the abundance of healthy children and overpopulation. To those critics,

I say we need less criticizing and more improving in our sales organizations, marketing and educational efforts to encourage greater per capita consumption of fruit and fruit products. This organization is dedicated to the proposition of efficient fruit production through educating the grower, thus giving him or her the tools to compete in a world market not only with growth-controlling rootstocks but all areas of fruit technology and fruit research. The IDFTA strongly supports research efforts through its rootstock research program funded by member contributions plus a self-imposed nursery liner assessment. This year the board has designated a record amount to be distributed to apple and cherry research.

Regrettably, however, our research efforts will be greatly curtailed in that the nursery industry is also suffering and has decided to suspend the liner assessment program. This represents the loss of a valuable partner in our research efforts. We sincerely trust the suspension of this program will be short-lived.

Your organization, like our industry, is going through some rough times but, if we pull together, we will prevail. So, I invite you to enjoy your conference, visit with old friends, make new ones, get to know your board of directors and help them with ideas and direction for future programs but, above all, enjoy yourselves and thanks for coming.

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