

GOT E-MAIL? Start a Club!

Marge Savage

West Texas African Violet Society

"Why don't you start a club in Midland?" The Pittmans and the Sanders were making me feel welcome at their Spring 1995 Magic Knight African Violet Show and Sale, my very first African violet show of any kind. By Spring 1999, many glorious national and state African violet shows later, I had returned home from the Houston AVSA Convention full of confidence, but LONELY. I was the only person growing African violets in all of West Texas and Southeastern New Mexico! I wanted to belong to an African violet club!

Forming a solid African violet club might be a difficult accomplishment given our wide, open spaces; but we West Texans are used to traveling long distances for things we care about. So, I e-mailed Bev Promersberger, AVSA Affiliate Chairman, and asked for her help. She promptly sent me the Affiliate start-up packet and e-mailed me the names and addresses of current African Violet Magazine subscribers from Abilene to Lubbock to Carlsbad, New Mexico. Locally, I contacted the USDA Horticultural Extension Agent, a former member of the "club they used to have," and a Velma Lewis. Velma had donated an award given to me at the preceding LSAVC Convention and Show. She later notified me that she was living in nearby Andrews.

All of these people received a letter mid-May which started: "I am interested in having an African Violet Club in our area which is affiliated with the African Violet Society of America." The day after the mailout three people called! Violet growers! Very excited! With an offer of a meeting place! These people spoke Violet-ese, like: Pixie Blue, Pat Hancock and Melvin J. Robey! I was NOT the only soul growing violets in the entire Southwest!

We quickly set a meeting date. Seven brown-fingernailed people attended. During this organizational meeting, I mentioned my wishes to have a club that 1) affiliated with AVSA, 2) held African violet shows and 3) planned African violet sales. The old club had died, apparently. To keep a club alive, we needed goals and support. They agreed.

Meanwhile, six more replies came in, some by e-mail. One letter arrived postmarked Abilene, 150 miles away, from a grower who was



Marge Savage at LSAVC 2001 in Dallas

gravely ill. He wanted to help us get started, although he probably wouldn't be able to come to meetings. Eric remained a member until his death last fall.

By August 1999, we had to scramble for chairs to seat fifteen members. We volunteered to be officers, set dues and named ourselves West Texas African Violet Society. Our meeting place benefactor had lost her business, so we moved to Barnes Noble Booksellers. During the Christmas Holidays their representative called it say they would no longer allow us meeting space, so I made still another phone call. Community and Senior Services welcomed us to their large, bright administrative offices where we meet to this day.

During September, Bill Foster e-mailed me. At the monthly meeting of First Nighter African Violet Society of Dallas, Mrs. Mildred Greene offered to sponsor our West Texas African Violet Society with a membership in AVSA. This beautiful gesture was followed by a welcoming membership in the Lone Star African Violet Council, voted on during their Annual Meeting. This acceptance and support have greatly nourished our new club.

Bev Promersberger helped some more. She included us in her African Violet Magazine feature, Affiliate Update and added us to the AVSA web site. This publicity yielded interested people and at least one very active new member. In addition, Bev gave us some pointers on how to deal with a club-killing

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personality. As our Vice-President says, "I feel too good after one of our meetings to let anything bad happen to our club."

So, it is not all a bed of violets. But the good outweighs the challenging, any day! We are affiliates of AVSA and LSAVC; we have held several sales; and by the time you read this we hope to still be alive and kicking after our very first African Violet Standard Show, "Violets Come to Bush Country!" We did not come to this point alone. Wonderful Violet People across Texas and the United States, to whom we

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owe many thanks, supported and strengthened us along the way.

After our rain-soaked drive home from the LSAVC 2000 Convention and Show in Dallas, our Publicity Chairman asked, "What was your favorite part of the Show?" So many special memories of that show flooded in. As I sorted through all the kindnesses, the same answer came again, and again, "My favorite time? When we were all seated together around the table at the Awards Banquet." I belong to an African Violet Club!