

Symposium Report

May 21, 2002

To: The Board Of Directors

As of the date of my original letter in early February, I was contemplating not mailing an invitation to attend the Symposium. At that point, we did not have enough information and participation to make a mailing worthwhile. I also contemplated that fact that it would be better to cut our losses and not have a Symposium. If I had been aware of the time needed in preparation and planning, and the fact that the majority of the members were not willing to help in any way, I would have declined the invitation to host. In addition, I prepared a Symposium that was a joint Southeast Section and National Meeting in order to save our section members the cost of attending 2 meetings this year. I am disappointed to say that this has not helped our attendance and participation.

Participation was, and still is, lacking from both sectional and national members. Basically, I feel that the majority of our members seem not to care. Most are not willing to commit to the Symposium in any way - which includes planning, speaking, committee participation, etc. As of my original letter, there was not ONE response to the request I put in three Fusions. Many regular members were asked to help with or present Seminars - most refused and others cancelled after commitment.

In addition, we had a hard time getting vendors to attend. Dan Wilt and Mike Greico have worked very hard on this area of the Symposium. They have spent multiple hours each day trying to attract new vendors, as well as keep past vendors in the Symposium. Past vendors do not want to return, mostly due to poor turnout. It is not cost effective for vendors to exhibit. Our vendors support us in so many ways. Without them, we would not have enough funding to have a Symposium. At our current level, we have 4 regular glassblower members to one vendor.

All during the planning and preparation for this Symposium, I have been frustrated and disappointed in our members. I worked on the Symposium at least four hours each day in the early stages, and up to 7 hours a day in the late stages. Then, I still had work to do in the shop, most of it on the weekends to make up for the lost time.

Several questions still come to mind: Are we going to have enough members show up this year? Are the costs going to be covered? I am truly disappointed in the members that have cancelled hotel reservations to stay somewhere else. I realize the economy is slow, but this impacts the society as a whole - if we don't meet room block, the society pays a penalty.

I feel it is the responsibility of the BOD and members to have a good Symposium - the full responsibility should not fall on the Symposium Chair. I also feel it is the responsibility of the BOD to encourage commitment and participation in all phases of a Symposium. Without participation and commitment, the Society as a whole will fail.

Before planning of future Symposiums, a lot of questions need to be addressed. First, will our current membership level continue to support the large costs associated with a Symposium of this caliber? Second, can we attract new and keep old vendors to help defray a portion of the costs? Third, can we continue to charge the current prices for seminars and workshops and still expect members to attend? (If we could increase membership, we could offer the seminars and workshops free. This in turn would probably increase attendance.) Fourth, how can we increase our membership? Currently, there are a large number of potential members that are sectional members, who are not national members. (Please note that I sent out over 600 invitations to these potential national members. These individuals total approximately 250 more than we currently have registered as national members.)

I would like to say a special thank you to Dan Wilt, Mike Grieco, Mike Souza, and Rick Smith for their tremendous support in all planning phases of the Symposium. They are the select few who have put forth the extra effort to help with the Symposium.

In the end, I feel we have planned a wonderful Symposium. To all the members, we hope you enjoy the wide variety of learning experiences we have planned for you. Thank you for your attendance, and we hope you enjoy every aspect of this Symposium.

Gene