

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Members & Delegates

Greetings. I have requested this opportunity to provide an update to you, the members and controlling body of the American Federation of Aviculture, Inc. (AFA), regarding the many positive changes that are occurring in our organization. My last formal address to you was made at the House of Delegates meeting at the Houston Convention in August 2001. At that time the organization was faced with declining membership and income in conjunction with increasing costs. Budget analysis reflected that these basic sources of our income were sufficient to cover either the cost of our publication (the AFA Watchbird) or the administrative costs, but not both. Charitable donations have enabled us to maintain and support our basic operations, but this income was also declining. The end-of-the-year Financial Statement for 2000 reflected a net loss of \$42,000, due mainly to reductions in revenue versus increases in costs.

Early in 2001, the Board of Directors had taken immediate steps to reduce costs to levels within anticipated income, to define and seek new sources of income and to develop a strategic plan to be able to maintain and increase membership benefits once we moved beyond the immediate crisis period. One step that had to be taken was to reduce the number of Watchbird issues in 2001 from a total of six (6) to a total of four (4). Similarly, adjustments had to be made with "Fast Ads" as the cost to provide this service was nearly 3 times higher than the income being generated. At the House of Delegates meeting, you, the governing body of AFA, took significant additional action by raising the cost of individual and family

memberships by \$10, and by increasing the discretionary powers of the Board to adjust the fee component of the total membership cost as necessary to better manage AFA. Also, as you know from last year's convention, our corporate sponsor, Sun Seed, did not flinch but maintained its steadfast support of AFA through the crisis period. I publicly thank Sun Seed for their support and urge you to do the same.

The Bottom Line

Collectively, these actions, while painful, were effective. The end-of-the-year Financial Statement for 2001 reflects that net revenue (total income-total expenses) was on the order of \$52,000—note that this is a positive number. Further, the strategic planning that was prompted by the financial crisis of 2000 has resulted in some exciting changes in AFA. These changes are leading to a streamlined and more effective organization providing increased membership benefits, prompt and pleasant membership services, and greater educational opportunities.

Some individuals need special recognition for their contributions during the crisis period. These include 1) the entire Watchbird staff (Sheldon Dingle, Mary Jean Hessler, and Associate Editors Roger Bringas and Carolyn Swicegood) who labored without any or greatly reduced compensation throughout most of 2001; and 2) CFO Jim Hawley and Co-Chair of the Finance Committee, Donna Mallory-Field who not only made ends meet, but also physically packed, moved, and unpacked the office at its new location in early 2002. I should mention many, many others, but will stop here. I must, however, commend the Officers and Board of the AFA. They all focused on problem-solving and working together at a time when the tendency was to do just the opposite. The crisis was a character building experience for the organization. Nevertheless, I think we have had enough "character building" for the moment—we will strive to avoid

similar situations in the future.

Now, let me talk about just a few of the changes that have occurred, and some of our plans for 2002. I will start with the changes in the Watchbird followed by a description of the new office location and administration, and the move. Lastly, I want to talk a little about Convention 2002 in Tampa, Florida.

The Watchbird

First, the last issue of 2001 was delayed significantly and did not "come out" until mid- to late January. Significantly none of the delay was financial in nature, but rather was attributable to what can be described as "Murphy's Law: Everything that can go wrong will go wrong." For the first time in our history, we made the transition from a manual to a digital layout and publishing process. This transition was not seamless—especially in terms of color products. These delays led to other slips in schedules, then the holidays, etc. and so on. I apologize that you were not kept better informed. I wish to emphasize however, that the problems encountered have been addressed, and solutions have been developed. The first of the four issues for 2002 will come out on schedule in the first quarter of 2002. This first issue is, in fact, complete with the exception of this message.

While we have elected to stay with four issues of the Watchbird in 2002, each issue in 2002 will consist of 80 pages or more (about 320 total pages per year). This compares to 60 pages or more that would be contained in six issues, or a total of about 360 pages per year. The quarterly schedule greatly reduces publication and mailing costs, enabling us to maintain about the same volume of content and color as before. Further, the reduced number of volumes will result in more time for improving the content rather than spending this time on the mechanics of production. I think you will find the new Watchbird to be a superior product, maintaining the appearance standards of the historical journal, while improving the content.

The New AFA Office

Historically, AFA has attempted to serve its membership through an office staffed by one to two paid employees, supported as necessary, by volunteers. Usually, there has been only one full-time, paid staff person supported by part-time help and volunteers. Considering the full scope of office activity that is required (from telephone, to filing and record-keeping, to filling band and store orders, to bookkeeping) it is simply too much for one person and part-time volunteers to handle effectively. Further, computers and software and office equipment have to be acquired, maintained, serviced, and updated. All the while, costs of rent and utilities grind on. If there is illness or the need for time-off for the paid staff, office operations are necessarily curtailed. AFA has become too large and complex to operate effectively under this approach.

Fortunately, there are association-management companies available to groups like AFA. These companies typically have large staffs, including people with advertising, convention planning and management, publishing and business skills; state-of-the-art computers and software; and they are familiar with the problems facing relatively small, non-profit businesses like AFA. Such companies enable immediate upgrades in capabilities and services for groups of small businesses. In our case, these improved services can be provided at the same (or less) cost overall than we were experiencing.

We have selected one of these companies, Attaché International, Inc. to conduct and manage the AFA office operations. This group has an outstanding track record, and came highly recommended by their present and past clients. The personnel they have committed to our operation include their CEO Jim Spawn, Esther Aboumaali, and Sharon Bosley. To date, we could not be more pleased with their performance.

This move gives the organiza-

tion a more complete professional office staff and up-to-date facilities to better serve our membership. All membership records, subscriptions, the AFA Store inventory, CITES merchandise, back issues of Watchbird, and AFA bird leg bands have been moved to the new office.

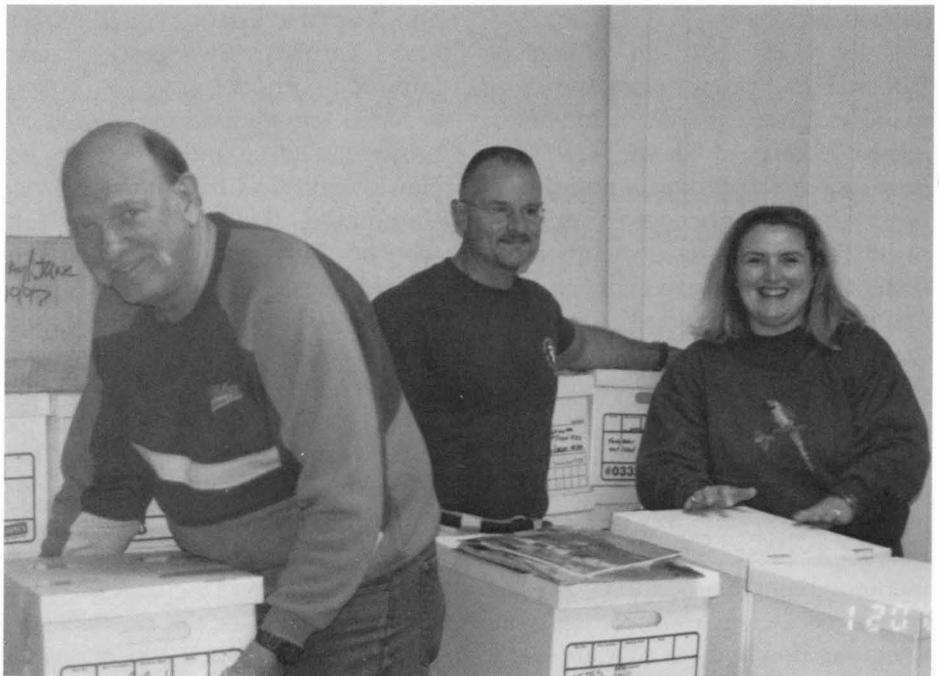
The Move

The move was quite an event. It began with a simple plan. Donna Mallory-Field and Jim Hawley would meet at the office on 14 December 2001 and spend a couple of days to organize and pack the office for the move. Donna left on 18 December, leaving a "little bit" left for Jim to do over the next few days. Jim worked most every day following her departure, calling upon family and other volunteers to help. The "little bit" kept expanding. Finally, in mid-January, Jim called for help to pack a medium-sized U-Haul trailer for the move. He noted that there was still a "little bit" of packing left to do.

On 18 January, Donna, Dr. Darryl Styles, and Brent Andrus arrived at the office to finish the "little bit" of packing and to load the trailer. By the end of the day the stack of stuff to be moved dwarfed the size of the trailer. The trailer was

returned and a truck was obtained. Over the course of a day or two, the truck was filled. Its bumper rested firmly on the curb from all the weight and there was still a lot of stuff to be loaded, and a "little bit" of packing was still left to do. This truck was unloaded, and the largest truck in the U-Haul fleet was obtained and loaded. All's well that ends well.

Jim and Donna, closet AFA truck drivers, next drove the truck to the Kansas City offices of Attaché International, Inc. arriving at 12:30 am on 28 January 2002. The Attaché office was disrupted at about 8:30 a.m. on the morning of 28 January from the apparent breakdown of a large U-haul truck in front of their corporate offices. People in offices on the same block began calling around to see if anyone knew what the commotion was about. Jim Spawn advised his neighbors that, while he was expecting a small U-haul trailer of records from a new client, he had no idea why a large truck was blotting out the sun in front of their offices. Investigating, he was approached by a short, stocky, unshaven, glassy-eyed individual accompanied by a wild-eyed woman with hair in disarray and obviously in shock. "Jim," said Jim,



Left to Right, Brent Andrus, Darrel Styles, and Donna Mallory-Field packing boxes for the office move.

Photos by moving crew.

“we brought the stuff.” A few days later all was unloaded and Jim Hawley left a bit earlier than Donna (a “little bit” of unpacking was left to do). Jim got out in advance of an impending ice-storm; Donna got to stay a little longer due to the ice storm.

I must say that Jim Spawn and the Attaché International staff took the event rather well—all things considered. As best I can tell, he has not been physically harmed by his neighbors, at least not as of this writing. He and his staff are quickly bringing all phases of the new AFA operation on-line and in a professional manner. I think you will be very pleased with the outcome.

The 2002 Convention

This year’s Convention is really shaping up to be a very exciting meeting. The House of Delegates meeting is scheduled for all day on Thursday to insure there is time to address the state of AFA, make special awards, describe new programs and initiatives, make By-law changes, swear in new officers and many other things. Half a day is simply not adequate for fully briefing the governing body of AFA about the business and status of AFA. We will meet for a full day.

The Exhibit Hall will open at noon on Thursday and will remain open through Saturday. Delegates will thus have an early opportunity to see and visit the outstanding exhibits and products that will be featured. Thursday’s activities will close with a bus trip to Lowry Park Zoo where a seafood buffet (also chicken and veggies) will be prepared and served to our members by the Officers and Board. Recall that I am a Marine Biologist by trade and I can guarantee that the seafood will be unparalleled in quality—fresh from the Gulf of Mexico. There will also be a hosted bar (read free; i.e., no extra cost above the event fee) music, dancing and a lot of fun. We have, in effect, combined the “President’s Gala” and zoo trip events into one super extravaganza.



Attaché International personnel, L to R: Jim Spawn, Esther Aboumaali, Carol Justice, and Sharon Bosley

Don’t miss it.

Friday and Saturday will feature full days of talks and Round Table discussions focusing on Issues in Aviculture. The upcoming Animal Welfare Act, the shipping crisis, and other avicultural issues will be featured. We already have commitments from key government personnel to update us on these issues. The slate of speakers that is being assembled is truly outstanding.

Saturday evening will begin with a reception and silent auction, followed by our traditional Banquet. We have devoted a considerable amount of planning in order to reduce the total time required for Banquet activities, while retaining

the best elements of the event. We envision the reception and Banquet to be a dress-up, fun-filled affair, followed by dim lights and music (dancing allowed).

In contrast to other Conventions, we have planned a series of educational and informative workshops for Sunday morning. These will be how-to-do-it type workshops, presented by the experts and top names in the field of aviculture. The preliminary list of topics and people to conduct the workshops are really impressive. When you see the list, I’m sure you will agree with me that the workshops alone are worth the price of admission.

Thank you for reading this article. AFA is moving forward, and I envision a bright future for the organization. Changes are being made—changes that have been necessary to cope with today’s economic climate, especially given the events of September 11. I’ll talk to you some more in the next issue of Watchbird. By that time, I plan to be able to share the key elements of an emerging Business Plan with you. If at all possible, I urge everyone to try and attend this year’s Convention, including the House of Delegates meeting. I think it could be some serious fun. ➤



Oh, oh! We’re not in Phoenix any more! The crew had to temporarily restrain Hawley. The eyes tell all.