

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

On a number of occasions during the past few years I have found myself on a judging panel with one or more of our most senior judges. These judges mark their judging experience not merely in years but in decades. They enjoy a special status as respected elders among judges and, with their long experience, they have a great deal to offer to breeders, exhibitors and our newer judges. These folks love judging dogs and some of them would be a bit lost without this involvement in the dog show world.

Sadly, it can be a struggle for some of our proud seniors to complete a full assignment. Most of the time they try to bear with the near exhaustion and physical discomfort of continuing for fear of having to admit that the assignment is just too much for them at this point in their career. Keep in mind that these are people who are well known and highly regarded, so clubs want them on their show panels, even though their advancing years have begun to compromise their endurance. Too often though, these seniors are assigned full loads with two or more groups to judge. When invited to judge at a cluster of four, five or more shows, they may be reluctant to turn down one or more of the shows in the cluster, thinking that if they do, their phone may stop ringing because word will get out that they can no longer perform their judging duties.

The AKC has a step down program intended to handle this situation. This listing lets clubs know that the listed judges have limited themselves to 100 dogs per day. Some judges have availed themselves of this program, while others are comfortable with assignments of more than 100, yet they do not wish to continue to judge full loads. They seem to see no alternative between the 100 limit and the all-breed show maximum of 175.

There is no need to continue this "either/or" mentality. A judging contract is just that, a contract. The initial call or e-mail from a club is usually an inquiry as to one's availability on the dates of the clubs shows, and an inquiry regarding one's

customary fee. Sometimes it is an offer of judging assignments, pending fee and availability. This is the perfect time to make a counter offer. For example, "Yes, I am available, but only on some of the dates in your cluster." Or you might say, "I am available on all of your dates, however, I am only accepting a maximum of X shows per week now." Once availability is established there is the discussion of one's fee. Here you need to be honest with yourself. Would you prefer to get the highest fee the market will bear and risk struggling through a very uncomfortable afternoon each day, or take proportionately less for the guarantee of a shorter and much more pleasant day. The latter may extend your judging career for more years than you might imagine. Don't be concerned that clubs will turn down your request for a shorter day, so long as your proposal is balanced with a corresponding reduction in your usual fee. Of course the reduced load limit should not be too drastic as your expenses alone may make it unworkable for some clubs depending on your proximity to the show site. Barring that, most clubs will accept your offer. While they may not do so for a relatively unknown judge, most will see the advantage of having an experienced, well known and versatile judge on their panel. Your counter offer may go something like this. "As you may know, my usual fee is \$X per day plus expenses, however, I am no longer comfortable judging 175 dogs and two or more groups per day, so I am willing to cut my fee by X% in exchange for a guarantee that my assignment will be no more than 135 dogs and one group".

What you are doing is negotiating to reduce your risk of being assigned 175 dogs and two or more groups. Perhaps the club would not have assigned you 175 dogs, but at some hot summer cluster, do you really want to risk it? The club may also realize that if a 175 dog load is not the norm at their show, your offer is a bargain for the club. It is actually a win-win situation. The judge can perform at his or her best, enjoy the entire judging assignment and remain active in the sport for a longer period of time. The club can have some experienced, well known judges grace

their judging panel without breaking the club's treasury.

A variation on this negotiation, if you don't mind taking the risk of going beyond your comfort range, is to offer the discounted fee for the reduced load with the option of going over the limit for your full fee plus a premium. Also, since outside shows seem to be the most tiring, you might consider limiting only your outside shows, that is, if you still choose to judge them. Indeed, some indoor summer shows which are not airconditioned can be nearly as difficult.

These suggestions have only scratched the surface of the possible negotiations you might want to consider. Of course you must keep the club's needs in mind if you are going to reach a satisfactory agreement for both you and the club. A few clubs are so financially stressed that they may feel that they must assign every judge a maximum load in order to get the most value from every judge they hire. A show chair was recently overheard saying she assigns all of her judges over 180 dogs based on the previous year to be sure that each of her judges have a full load. While this makes financial sense, and some judges enjoy having a full load every day, these are the assignments you may want to tactfully avoid. The stress here is on the word "tactfully", since the club's circumstances may change, or new officers with a different approach may run the club in the future, so it makes no sense to burn your bridges.

Let the newer, younger, more physically able judges take the 175 dog assignments in 98 degree heat out in some bumpy field riddled with gopher holes. These younger judges will be thrilled to do it, and it will do them a great deal of good. You can be a bit more selective now. You've earned it. Don't think that you will be forgotten if you do not accept every possible assignment. You are much more likely to be crossed off a club's list of possible future judges by not completing assignments or appearing to drag your failing body through your contracted obligations. If you look like you are in pain, even if you are not, that perception will be much more damaging to your future prospects than exercising some selectivity and

restrictions in the assignments you accept.

If you are among this growing group of senior judges, I hope you consider making the necessary adjustments in your negotiations with clubs which will preserve your reputation, while assuring that you enjoy every one of your assignments for many years to come.