

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CONFORMATION JUDGES' COMPENSATION SURVEY: FOLLOWUP

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

In the last issue of *The Voice*, we published the results of our survey on judges' compensation. I am going to use my space in this issue to comment on the results of this survey and some related observations and speculations.

Perhaps the most surprising result of the survey is the seemingly odd mean and median fees of those respondents with six groups as compared to those with five groups. The fee for six groups was lower! How could that be? I suspect that in the real world it is not so. I do not believe the very small sample of judges with six groups was enough to accurately reflect the fees charged by this segment of the judging community. Why so few judges of six groups responded to the survey is anyone's guess, but this particular outcome can be ignored simply based on common knowledge. The sample number of judges with all breeds was equally small and therefore also not much more reliable as an indicator of what is charged by this group of judges.

As for the rest of the median and mean scores, one can have more confidence in the accuracy of the results based on the larger samples and our common experience. I hope the next time we do such a survey we will have greater participation among those with six or seven groups, the smaller number of these judges notwithstanding.

The one thing that stood out to me about the results of this survey was that it evidenced a point about judging fees that I made six years ago. Namely, that judging fees have been steadily falling in relation to inflation. In my column on the subject of judging fees in Volume 19, Number 1 of *The Voice*, back in 2013, available at adsj.org, I argued that one could clearly see this decline over the preceding forty-five years. At the time the only cause I attributed to this phenomenon was that judges held down their fees as a way to help struggling clubs. While this, plus the fear of appearing relatively over priced, may have been major contributors to the relative decline (again in relation to inflation) of judging fees, there are some other very important influences that should not be overlooked. First and foremost is the IRS reporting requirement of \$600.00. I may return to this influence on judging fees at a later date. For now, suffice it to say that this requirement has had a direct inhibiting effect on the fees charged especially by group judges

of 2 to 4 groups, and hence an indirect effect on the judges with 4 to 7 groups.

The other downward influence on judging fees is related to the massive give away of breed approvals under the recent AKC "open-door" policy. A downward pressure on judging fees is exactly the intended result that the architect of this disastrous policy had hoped for. But even he would have been surprised at how quickly this plan bore fruit. The idea was that once there was a flood of judges in the market, there would be no need for a club to fly in a judge from afar and certainly no need to pay a judge any more than a very nominal fee if any at all. It was viewed as simple supply and demand, and correctly so. Overlooked in this plan was the immediate effect of a stampede. In the rush to take advantage of a system that everyone knew could not last, many were happy to judge for free or expenses only, to get the required number of assignments out of the way so that another batch of new breeds or another group could be easily and quickly acquired. Given the arbitrary and somewhat repressive nature of some of the past approval systems, one could hardly blame these judges for taking advantage of this free-for-all while it lasted. An immediate under cutting of judging fees began as soon as this plan was put in practice. In other words, the plan worked better and faster than even its designer had imagined. It truly exceeded his expectations!

The current AKC Board seems to be trying to get the approval process under control and on a more rational basis, but as a sport, we will live with the on going damage done by the open-door policy for quite some time.

The thought that, "I will judge for free or very little now so that I can quickly accumulate a larger number of groups, and then charge a fee," is not limited to just some of those in the open-door policy stampede. To be honest, I suspect it plays a part in the thinking of some, and I emphasize **some**, of our delegate judges. This fee-lowering influence is the direct result of the AKC policy denying the delegates the right to charge a fee for their work as dog show judges. This policy has had a depressing effect on judging fees since long before the open-door policy. As is so often the case when it comes to policies that have resided in a large bureaucratic organization for many decades, this policy became outdated, irrelevant to contemporary life, and rather hypocritical.

For the reasons cited above, the fees charged for judging are now actually going to cover the many expenses incurred by judges that could not be listed on a judging invoice. Nonetheless, they are expenses that are legitimate and would be allowed by the IRS

for any self-employed contractor. If the average judge claimed judging as their business, after taking all of the allowed expenses, they would probably show a loss at the end of the year. This loss would shelter other taxable income. However, after a certain number of years the IRS would step in and disallow this activity as a business arguing it is a hobby and hence losses may no longer shelter other income. Yes, you could occasionally ignore some expenses and thereby show a small profit just to forestall the IRS, but for how long?

Obviously, I am not optimistic regarding the future improvement of judging fees, which leads me to be somewhat concerned about the future of judging and the credibility of dog shows. Let me explain. As the decline in fees relative to inflation continues and the number of breeds and hence the breed knowledge required to judge increases, these two trajectories may cross at some point. If that happens, many qualified judges may well conclude that judging is no longer worth the effort and expense. True, these may not be the core of judges that love judging and are so dedicated to the sport that regardless of its personal costs they will fervently pursue their hobby. But we never will have enough of those judges to staff all of our shows. The qualified judges who call it quits may nonetheless be an important population that is necessary to maintain the credibility and integrity of the dog show world.

Who will take their place and to what effect?

It may be that at some point, after holding down judging fees for so long, a new set of policies will have to be implemented to hold down the requirements of breed knowledge and experience so that more people will be allowed to flow into the judging ranks and share in the “great fun” of pointing to the winners. In other words we may have to “dumb down” the requirements to attract new judges. We may have actually reached that point with the open-door policy. Now that we are pulling back from the brink, I hope we will rethink the larger picture. An old adage comes to mind, “You get what you pay for.”

I just read somewhere that American judges are the “highest paid in the world”. I would hope so! That does not mean they are highly paid. Only that they are paid more than what is common in most other countries. In some countries judges can go from two breeds to all-breed literally over night simply because they need more all-breed judges to staff their shows. Even the very permissive open-door policy did not go that far, but it was clearly a step in that direction.

In the final analysis, never judge dogs primarily for the judging fees. They will never be adequate compensation for all the labor, expense and

preparation involved. Judge for the enjoyment of the process and the aesthetic pleasure that comes with finding a great one.