

From Vol. 32 No. 1 on "The Recertification Testing Program"

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dr. Gerard C. Penta

As you know, the AKC has implemented a Recertification Testing Program designed to begin testing with older judges, especially those with fewer assignments than they have had in the past.

In principle, I'm sure we all would agree that judges should be familiar with the AKC policies and procedures. However, starting with this premise does not necessarily lead to the current testing program. My initial response to hearing of the program is the quaint old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." In other words, we first should ask if there really is a need for such a testing program? Has there been an increasing number of gross infractions of policy and/or procedures? What prompted the testing program? If there is a need could there be a better way of dealing with deviations from acceptable practice than this harsh approach?

The program as described will put an unnecessary pressure on our most senior judges. I think it will probably push some to retire from judging rather than face an online test on AKC policies and procedures that could result in the immediate loss of their judging approval. If that is the intention, the recertification testing program may well do the job. However, this outcome would seem to be at odds with the common complaint among so many exhibitors that the large crop of newly minted group judges may have been too hastily approved and do not seem to have a good handle on the many breeds for which they have been given judging approval. I'm sure the AKC has heard this complaint far more frequently than exhibitors concerned about ring procedure or a judge lacking detailed knowledge of AKC policy and procedures.

Many will see this testing program as just another money grab. Starting with the questionable edict that the Judging Department should pay for itself, there has been an effort to create a money machine out of the judging approval process. The Canine College is a clear example of this. The attempt to get breed education "in the can" so to speak, so that with little or no effort or expense on the part of AKC the judging approval and advancement system can become a cash cow rather than a cash drain on the organization. The proposed annual fee for judges was an earlier attempt to further this objective. This new testing program seems to be of the same ilk but capable of generating even more anxiety, anger and backlash.

Two things should be kept in mind. At the outset, we are talking about older judges, many of whom are not comfortable with computers. Taking tests on the computer forces them to be tested in a manner that is foreign to the way they have taken tests all of their lives. Then, combining this unease with the heavy handed threat of the immediate loss of their ability to accept assignments and the embarrassment of public failure and demotion, may as stated above, prompt some to avoid this risk and just retire. Some very good judges could be lost in this way.

Unintended anti AKC sentiment may be fostered, not by a concern for enhancing knowledge of AKC policy and procedures, but by the ham handed method of achieving this goal. I am aware of some

excellent and very experienced judges who have voluntarily cut back on the frequency of their assignments simply due to the physical demands of extensive travel and full load assignments. They do not deserve to be singled out, harassed and threatened because they have reduced the number of assignments they wish to accept. There must be a better way of addressing this issue. Here's hoping the AKC Board of Directors reconsiders this "sudden death" Recertification Testing Program*