

# Annual Seedling Sale Supports Forestry Scholarships and Mission of Local Alaska Chapter

BY ROGER BURNSIDE

**F**undraising is essential to help support the day-to-day activities and general mission of any professional organization.



However, given the inevitable ebbs and peaks in membership, ongoing changes in leadership structure and availability of volunteers, changes in organization policies, and other real-life challenges of our modern “information overloaded” society, the best laid plans for maintaining continuity in fundraising efforts often go awry. One local Alaska SAF chapter modified the operation of its primary annual fundraiser over the past four years to take advantage of modern technology and the Internet in spite of declining membership, increasing advertising costs and general societal changes that threatened to hamper fundraising and financial obligations to support its overall mission.

The Cook Inlet Chapter SAF in south-central Alaska has conducted and promoted an annual tree seedling fundraiser to generate funds for chap-

ter operations since the mid-1970s.

Surprisingly, with no support from any publicly supported seedling nurseries since the early 1990s (i.e., Alaska’s sole seedling nursery ceased operations almost 20 years ago) and the prohibitive cost of private retail greenhouses and nurseries propagating tree seedlings for resale, the chapter worked out an arrangement with a large Canadian nursery, PRT USA Nurseries to provide seedlings at a slightly lower cost (i.e., due to the chapter’s “not for profit” status) that are sewn approximately 15 months prior to the annual sale and shipped to Anchorage for its annual Arbor Day Tree Seedling Sale each May.

During the 30-plus years of the Cook Inlet Chapter fundraiser (and



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**Sue Rodman, Alaska SAF chair, and Mitch Michaud, Cook Inlet Chapter chair, are ready to sell trees and promote SAF!**

prior to the advent of the Internet) significant print advertising costs to promote the sale, and efforts to sell a few thousand seedlings during just two to three Saturdays in May, took a major commitment of volunteer time and resources for a relatively small net profit. Annual sales in the “early” years were quite variable in both numbers of seedlings sold and profits since the seedling order is assembled over a year in advance of the actual sale. Without a more efficient and inexpensive means to promote the sale and track orders (e.g., email and personal computers), it was challenging to gauge the potential profits each year and actual market for seedlings. For example, seedling sales the first couple of decades averaged only a couple thousand each year; during the period 1995-2004, annual sales ranged from 6,000 to 10,000 seedlings. However, in the aftermath of the 1990s’ spruce beetle epidemic in south-central Alaska—roughly the early to mid-2000s—interest increased for tree seedlings to restore spruce forests cleared to reduce hazardous fire fuels in and around Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, spiking seedling demand upward to as many as 21,000 seedlings sold in 2005. In spite of the apparent interest for seedlings from the general



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**Cook Inlet Chapter volunteers spring into action during the annual seedling sale in Anchorage. Shown left to right: Jeff Graham, Sue Rodman, Steve Patterson and Roger Burnside.**



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**The general public line up outside REI in anticipation of receiving their seedlings.**

Hoyt, a recently deceased chapter member. In addition to supporting these scholarships, it's been increasingly important to the chapter to facilitate the annual public seedling sale as a means to interact with the general public, and discuss and talk about the importance of forestry and the care and propagation of trees.



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**A future forester.**

public, a significant portion of the 2005 order was sold to just a few institutional purchasers (local municipal entities and Alaska Native corporations). The chapter was still hampered by the uncertainty of the local seedling market to order thousands of seedlings in advance of the actual sale as well as the time-consuming efforts to mount a sufficient volunteer force to ensure that all seedlings ordered the previous year could be sold over a few Saturdays the following year. This became a major topic of discussion when the main tree sale coordinator for 25-plus years, Maynard Nuss, announced his "retirement" from the annual tree seedling sale in 2007.

Another challenge for the chapter has been a commitment to provide regular funding to support two endowed forestry scholarships at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) campus. One of the scholarships started with a significant contribution from the estate of Richard Tindall in 1997. The second scholarship was made possible with a one-time \$5,000 matching grant from UAF to the chapter in 2004 and was supported by the family of Michael

But alas, where there is a challenge one only needs to look for an opportunity. Foresters will continue to find a way to get the job done, with the help of the Internet and information technology. Since 2007, the chapter has modified its annual sale to provide a pre-ordering process for purchasers to pay for and reserve their trees several months ahead of the traditional spring "public" sale in May. The process is simply a posting of an Internet-based seedling order form on the Alaska State Society website during January. In February and March an email advertising blitz is conducted by sending the seedling order form to various agency interest groups, Alaska State Society email distribution list, UAF Cooperative Extension Service, local Master Gardener groups and past seedling purchasers. Advertising costs for the annual fundraiser are now almost non-existent since most advertising is accomplished electronically over any and all available outlets. The previous years' orders are tracked via

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computer spreadsheet for potential “future demand” and the next year’s order is placed, also based on sale interest and contacts generated during and just after the May sale.

In addition, the chapter has enlisted a local partner, REI (Recreational Equipment Inc.), a sports accessories and equipment retailer, for a prime public sale location. REI helps the

chapter promote the public sale and provides a space for distribution of pre-ordered seedlings as well as the traditional public sale “on-site” on one Saturday in May. The public seedling sale is coordinated with REI’s annual spring retail sale in Anchorage, providing an opportunity to sell trees and talk to a number of individuals that are already outdoors oriented and con-

## Chapter Hooks into Facebook

BY ALICIA SULLIVAN

**S**ocial media has changed the way people communicate. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn are the sites that are driving this change. These may be uncharted grounds for some of our membership, but for many of us interacting on one or more of these sites is part of our daily life. These sites provide another avenue to connect with people beyond email and websites, and are very important channels of information.

One of the first questions that I asked of our past officers when I started my term as chair for the South Puget Sound chapter was “Why aren’t we on Facebook?” The answer surprised me; it was something that had not been considered or identified as a way to communicate with the membership. Another concern was the security and protecting the privacy of members that want to be involved with the site.

Facebook groups are dedicated pages that allow for communication and sharing among members of the group. A group can be created for anything in Facebook, and there are several levels of security that can be set for the group based on your comfort level. For the South Puget Sound Chapter we chose to create a moderated group in which membership has to be approved by a moderator, which in our case is the chair, vice chair and a member of the University of Washington Student Chapter. This allows moderators to have control over who can join the group and for removal of members that misuse the group. Controls may also be set to moderate who is allowed to post to the group and what information can be seen by non-members.

Another important aspect to group pages is that unlike becoming “friends” with someone, when a person becomes a “fan” of the group page, other group members cannot see personal information unless your profile allows it. Once your group is created there are several tools available that allow members to communicate with each other. There is the main page of the group called the “wall,” which allows for members to post links, photos and comments. A discussion forum is also provided and a tool to create and manage events and message the group’s members is available.

Within three days of setting up the group we had over 50 fans of the page. Most of these fans were SAF members, but several were colleagues in forestry that were not SAF members or connections on Facebook that were interested in natural resources. This I think is the true benefit of Facebook—reaching the non-member forestry professionals through social networks and providing a presence for SAF in social media. This is an opportunity to reach out to younger members and potential members as well as provide a voice for SAF and the natural resource profession. I would encourage chapters to look into Facebook and perhaps use this as an opportunity to engage a young professional member or student member within the chapter. ♦

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### Satisfied customers at the annual seedling sale.

cerned about the environment.

Chapter volunteers still participate in the annual seedling sale that has been streamlined to track all paid orders received through the chapter’s post office box by the sale coordinator. Only a handful of volunteers are needed to assist with email advertising, sort the pre-paid orders for distribution to purchasers and hold the seedling sale to the public on a single Saturday. Seedling sales have been larger (10,000-14,000 annually), but also more consistent with a pre-sale process.

PRT USA Nurseries has provided bed nursery stock in bundles rather than the old single seedling containerized plugs that were standard for many years. Bundles of 10-20 seedlings are sold rather than having to handle individual seedlings, which makes the dollar flow better and increases efficiency of handling. With selling just under 14,000 seedlings this year, profit is pretty good, about \$0.45-.50 net per seedling, allowing the chapter to generate significant funds to support existing scholarship endowments and other efforts, such as helping students attend the SAF National Convention. ♦

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