

January 19, 2009

My fellow NAHRA members,

A lot has happened in the past month and as some of you may already know, Jim VanderGiessen resigned as President of the North American Hunting Retriever Association (NAHRA) on January 13, 2009. As per NAHRA's By-Laws, I have assumed the role of Vice President to President. Additionally, Kevin McLaren also tendered his resignation as NAHRA Treasurer. First, I would like to personally thank Jim and Kevin for their long-term service to NAHRA and continued support of our superb retriever program. Both, Jim and Kevin have held Board of Director (BOD) positions, judged, and participated in the NAHRA game for many years and we are grateful and will always be indebted to them for their dedication.

As I transition into the position of President, I fully accept, and am aware of the duties and responsibilities that come with the job as well as all the challenges. I wish this to be a new beginning that hopefully puts our organization in the right direction. In order for all of you to understand where NAHRA is currently and where I plan to lead it, I will address below, a number of the challenges that our organization is faced with and where I plan to focus our priorities.

With possibly only a one-year tenure as President, I hope to accomplish set goals with a very aggressive agenda by the end of 2009 and then step away. However, with NAHRA relying on work to be implemented through volunteers, this is not always an easy feat. Should my goals as President not be met, I would likely run for re-election to finish what I have started; at which time the membership body will have to decide what is in the best interest of the organization.

Up front, my biggest hope for this organization in 2009 is to make our membership feel good about the leadership and proud to be part of this amazing program. This can only be accomplished by improved communication at all levels; this means posting BOD meeting minutes on the website, quarterly action items, and timely responses to inquires and questions.

Since NAHRA is stretched across the country, many of us have not met, particularly outside of the eastern regions. I have been a NAHRA member since 1992 and a Board Member for the past 5 years, first as the Northeast Regional Director and then the Vice President. I have titled numerous dogs through all levels of the program and have served as a judge for approximately fifteen years.

I am employed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Regulatory Branch, working primarily in the wetlands program for the past 25 years. My profession as a wetlands biologist and traveling throughout the northeast led me down a path to my next passion, training retrievers. I purchased my first dog in 1990 and spent the next two years learning to train my dog, hunt waterfowl and run in AKC Hunt Tests.

Shortly, a friend introduced me to NAHRA and we were on an upward spiral ever since. Not long after I found about NAHRA, several friends and I created the Northern Piedmont Retriever Club (NPRC) and became NAHRA affiliated.

As you might have guessed, I became totally immersed in the NAHRA program, as did my club. Sound familiar? It wasn't long before I realized that NAHRA provided what I needed in a hunting dog and companion. I stopped running the other field test venues and totally committed myself to NAHRA and my club, NPRC. Moreover, with a fledgling guiding business, this further fueled my attachment to the program as NAHRA presented me with the perfect platform to train and test my dogs and ultimately, helped me produce the best hunting retrievers for the field and the blind. To a great program with great folks, I decided to give back by becoming a judge and eventually serving as a member of the BOD.

With my background, I feel I bring some experience and expertise to this position. If nothing else, I have proven to be a pretty good "Ramrod" in the past! However, there are many other facets of running this organization for which I am at a loss. Fortunately, the NAHRA organization is filled with individuals who possess these talents and attributes and NAHRA has always been lucky to have so many contribute selflessly. I might add that we have only scratched the surface in identifying NAHRA individuals with knowledge, experience, and talents and we need to continue to find them moving forward if we are to realize our full potential as an organization.

Enough about me, the first order of business; I would like to introduce our new BOD who were selected or moved up into new positions per the protocol in our current By-Laws. The new slate of officers or "Executive Board of Directors" will look as follows:

- Frank Plewa – President
- Sandy Zandlo – Vice President
- Bob Riggs – Secretary
- Dan Hove – Treasurer
- Kim Schiller – Member at Large

Sandy Zandlo (Minnesota) was Secretary and has assumed the position of Vice President. Sandy has held positions with in NAHRA as a handler, judge, Regional Director, and Secretary. Sandy, is an asset to the organization and remaining as part of the BOD will aid in keeping agendas and goals moving.

The next appointment was very easy, Bob Riggs (Iowa), Mid-West Regional Director was asked to fill the position of Secretary. Bob as the Mid-West Regional Director has been heavily engaged in several ongoing initiatives. Temporarily, Bob will retain his duties as Mid-West Regional Director until we can appoint a successor as well as take on his new role as Secretary.

Dan Hove (Minnesota) was a Member At Large and has moved into the Treasurer's position. As some of you know, Dan brings a lot to the table that will help this organization get back on its feet financially.

Per the By-Laws, the sitting President may appoint up to two At Large Members to the BOD. This decision was very easy for me but I sought the opinions of the past and current BOD for confirmation and received unanimous approval. Therefore, we have filled the Member at Large position with Kim Schiller (New York). Kim has proposed a website layout with new features which we hope to install this year (I will elaborate a bit further below).

I will only make a promise to you regarding my tenure as President, that is, to work aggressively until the end of this year. What I would like to do is bring ideas to the table and try to push them forward with the approval of the BOD as well as with the membership body's help and acceptance. Let me offer some of the ideas, plans, and goals that are already in the works for this year:

1. NAHRA Rulebook. The final revisions to the NAHRA Rule Book have been completed and approved by the BOD. A printable version will now be forwarded to the Treasurer and committee engaging perspective sponsors. We are hopeful pocket versions of the rulebook can be printed and are in the hands of judges and members for the start of the testing seasons in many of the Regions.

In the interim, a marked up copy will appear on our web site soon so that members can see the changes. This will be accompanied by a clean version for use until you receive your pocket version. Additional copies will be available for purchase at some point. An announcement will follow in that regard.

As a heads up, here are some of the highlights.

- All recent administrative changes and guidance developed by the BOD incorporated or referenced
- Code of Conduct
- The Hunter Stake
- New Titles (i.e. Hunting Retriever, Grand Master Hunting Retriever Champion)
- The addition of the land blind to Intermediate
- Judging pairs will be required to have 5 or more combined points (previously 3)
- To present a bit more clarity with the removal of terms such as "shall" or "should" and replaced with less ambiguous terms such as "must" or "will"

2. NAHRA Web Site (New look). This is an initiative that has already been underway. Kim Schiller and I have been exploring the possibility of replacing the current site with a new look along with many other possibilities. A basic site has been introduced in a proposal created by Kim for BOD review and has been approved. Additionally, it has been shared with past BOD and Doug Kelly, our current web master and without his efforts we would not be where we are now. It is our hope the new site will be an extension of what Doug has done for NAHRA to date. We hope to have the new site up in few months starting with the base pages and adding on additional features throughout the year. Some of

the other features will take a little longer to develop but it is my hope to have them installed by the end of 2009 or sooner:

- Electronic Office Capabilities
- Membership
- Member Account Management
- Searchable Rule Book
- On-line Studbook
- Closed Forum (accessible to current/in good-standing NAHRA members)
- Electronic Entry (other outside options are being considered as well)

3. Re-organization. One of the best contributions that our outgoing President, Jim Vandergiesen has made to the NAHRA organization is instilling “Democracy” and giving a sense of ownership for members. In response to discussions with members over my past five years, I am proposing to the BOD that a re-organization of regions be implemented this year. I believe that this change will afford better communication to the members and allow NAHRA clubs to take a larger role in deciding who runs the organization.

Since the clubs are the foundation of this organization, I believe the membership body should be able to control what individuals should serve on the BOD. While maintaining the Regional Director concept, I believe we should downsize the number of Regional Directors, which will improve communication to NAHRA Club Representatives and the NAHRA members.

The clubs are the platform in which events are offered, perform all of the work, and supply a large amount of the funds to NAHRA. Therefore, I believe clubs should control the appointments to the BOD - I foresee the following format:

- Reduction in the number of from eleven (11) to three (3) Regions (East, Central or Mid-West, West)
- Each Region will have an Regional Director elected by the members
- Officers or Executive BOD members will be elected by all NAHRA clubs
- A BOD appointed committee as per the current policy would generate the candidates

I believe this is the “cleanest” way to accomplish our goal of improved communication in addition to the referenced initiatives by the BOD above. This should also maintain representation on the BOD for all areas of the country for the most part and the clubs and members will be in control of future changes they foresee as needed through their votes.

With larger regions, the Regional Director must play a bigger role in communicating with the regions’ NAHRA Club Representatives. With the installation of quality individuals into the three Regional

Director positions, this task should not be a problem. One obvious issue at first glance would be regional events; I believe this can be worked out by holding several events within each territory.

One last thought in this area is the current election format of officers. To date, all officer positions expire at the same time. This is a bad practice potentially causing loss of continuity for the mission and or initiatives already engaged by an existing BOD. I will be asking the full BOD to consider staggering of elections for the officer and Regional Director Positions and also their length. This will mean some of the current BOD members will be extended to the end of 2010.

In my case, I believe that due to the circumstances in which I came to this position, I will propose to the BOD that the President position come up for election at the end of this year. My thought is to dispel any notions of empire building as you will have had one year to determine if the path in which I am leading you is where you want NAHRA to be. While I realize this may cause some disruption to the mission of the BOD, it will be a good decision if the members feel I am not on the right path. I will leave it to my performance in the short term to dictate if I am worthy of continuing in this role.

4. Finances – To grow as an organization and move into the future, NAHRA needs a stable platform for revenue. Currently, the only substantial revenue generated is from membership and the per dog tax we charge to participate in our Field Testing Program. The BOD is currently exploring new avenues and will devise a plan to move forward. Some thoughts and ideas being discussed and decided upon at this time:

- Banner advertising and sponsorships through the NAHRA website - We have not taken full advantage this revenue vehicle
- Studbook online, offers another potential source of income, again we hope to implement with the website re-design.

At this point, I want to be brutally honest with you regarding the financial state of NAHRA. As many have suspected, it is not very good. Many have questioned where we are financially and why the NAHRA office has not been supportive monetarily to initiatives for potential growth inspired by the clubs and or regions. Historically, NAHRA has not made any real attempt to market itself to the public and has pretty much relied on its rulebook and corresponding Field Test Program as its only means for growth. You are all aware of the dues increase. This was a small part of the problem if you consider that NAHRA has relied on these monies and those generated by the “running tax” mentioned earlier as its only means to run the office. While NAHRA does not generate a lot of bills, the same can be said about income. Unfortunately, this old way of business worked fine until membership and participation started to drop after 2000. Consequently, these monies have not been enough to carry the burden any longer.

From what I have seen, this time of year is generally very lean in terms of cash flow and in the past, directors have augmented this with loans to the organization. The continued drop in membership and participation appears to be the reason for these loans never being fully repaid. I suppose the love of the program is the reason most of these generous people have not asked for repayment to date. However, these notes still exist.

At this time, bills for 2009 are coming due and NAHRA will remain strapped. The practice has been to pay them off as monies are received but the cycle starts again the next winter when tests stop and memberships come due again. This cycle must now be broken. I believe the recent directors did a good job stopping the bleeding but the problem was not solved. Our hope is to do this with this new team of BOD members.

I wanted everyone to know where we are and the job this new BOD faces in solving our financial problem. It won't be enough to just solve our end of the year woes and repay our outstanding notes. We need a plan to produce a nest egg so that we can draw from it when good ideas and initiatives come forward. This team has an initial plan, which we hope to move out on shortly. However, even a good plan is worthless unless you execute and have the staying power to follow it through. I hope to accomplish this in 2009 but will need the help and cooperation of the membership.

As in all situations, some welcome change, others do not. As your BOD, we have been entrusted with the responsibility to do what is best for the organization. Again, I will make an extraordinary effort to communicate our plans and action items to you throughout the year. Please make it your goal to pass the information in the opposite direction. As always, I want you to know that I will be available to answer your questions, field your concerns, and hear your recommendations as much as I can. Please feel free to contact me directly by phone or email. I will do what I can to reply in a timely manner but remember there are over 700 of you so when appropriate, please utilize your Regional Director when you can.

At this time, I ask only one thing for the coming year; just do what you do every year as a NAHRA member and feel good about it! Have your tests, clinics and training sessions. Don't make comparisons to other programs and want what they have. You have a great program so just enjoy it and your dogs!

Thank you for listening,
Frank Plewa
NAHRA President