

A MESSAGE ABOUT FAIRNESS AND THE AAW BOARD ELECTION

Greg Schramek, AAW Board President

October 17, 2017

Greetings!

One of our organization's most important activities is the annual election of Board members. For thirty years, our elections have been conducted without controversy. But this year, I'm sorry to say, we had to remove one person from the ballot because of flagrant violations of the AAW's rules on campaigning. This person continues to complain about his treatment and to make false accusations about other candidates and current Board members.

Up to now, this person has directed his complaints to the Board. But, in a recent email, he has unfairly tried to drag chapter officers into the fray. I'd like to take the opportunity to apologize for his divisive statements and assure you that the Board took appropriate, necessary action to keep the election process open, fair, and equitable.

An election without campaigning

The AAW's Nominating Committee advises candidates that they may not campaign for themselves. They can answer questions about their position on issues that affect the AAW; otherwise, they can't solicit votes. The chair of the Nominating Committee explains this to each candidate.

There is one longstanding exception to this rule. Each year in *American Woodturner*, the candidates publish brief statements to introduce themselves and explain what they hope to accomplish as a Board member; over the years, many candidates have ended their statements by asking for votes or support. Since 2015, the AAW has also produced short videos, where each candidate gives his or her answer to the same set of questions.

The statements in *American Woodturner* and the videos give each candidate an equal opportunity to reach the members of AAW. This helps ensure that the candidates with the best messages - not the loudest megaphone, the most Facebook friends, or the most Twitter followers - prevail. These candidate statements go back to the earliest years of the AAW.

Until this year, every candidate for the Board has followed this longstanding practice of no campaigning. Once in a while, a candidate has tiptoed across the line; but, as soon as they are told of the infraction, they quickly and willingly retract whatever message has been delivered.

Action to halt persistent violations

This August, the chair of the Board's Nominating Committee informed the AAW's Ethics Committee that a candidate had violated the no-campaigning policy more than once. The Chair of the Nominating Committee reminded the candidate of the no-campaigning rule. Subsequently, the candidate published repeated appeals for members' votes in his chapter newsletter, and he knew that a third party sent members a letter soliciting their votes.

The candidate seemed to be searching for loopholes that would permit him to campaign. For

instance, he claimed that verbal instructions against campaigning could be misinterpreted (presumably making it OK to ask for votes); he implied that soliciting votes in a newsletter was permissible since the AAW Board Handbook didn't explicitly prohibit that; and he maintained that third-party messages can't be controlled (sidestepping his complicity in disseminating such messages). He refused to recognize that no campaigning means no campaigning. Period. (To be fair, the section of the Board Handbook on election procedures needs to be updated. I expect that will happen once this election is over.)

The Nominating Committee chair asked the AAW's Ethics Committee for its opinion regarding a campaign letter sent to most chapter presidents and to recommend an appropriate action to the Board. The Ethics Committee felt the letter did not adhere to the no-campaigning procedures, and recommended that the candidate be removed from the slate.

In early September, the Board held a special meeting to consider that recommendation. The candidate at the center of this controversy monitored the meeting, as was his right. After carefully reviewing the facts at hand, the Board voted unanimously to remove him from the slate. The Board had no choice. If it allowed one candidate to campaign, that would put the others at a disadvantage - worse, it would have called into question the fairness of the proceedings.

Since the special Board meeting, the ex-candidate has sent Board members multiple email messages. He demands to be reinstated and alleges that nearly every current Board member and every other candidate has violated the no-campaign practice.

His allegations are false.

To try to prove his point, he quotes from the candidates' statements in *American Woodturner* - the one forum where candidates can ask for members' votes or support.

My assurances and hopes

I can promise you that the five candidates remaining on the slate have acted honorably and observed all the rules. None of them has done any campaigning. If anyone tries to tell you otherwise, s/he doesn't know whereof s/he speaks.

I can also promise you that the Board and the Ethics Committee strived to be open and fair in considering how to deal with one candidate's repeated violations. If anyone tries to tell you otherwise, s/he doesn't know whereof s/he speaks.

To me, it makes no sense for someone to spend so much time and energy sowing discord and trying to divide the community that he wishes he could help lead. As chapter officers, you play a vital role in knitting together our growing family of woodturners. I hope I can count on you to continue to be unifiers and ignore this one disgruntled individual's cries.

Voting in this year's election will end soon. Fortunately, the five remaining candidates all have outstanding records of accomplishment as well as noteworthy work for their local chapter and the AAW as a whole. Any of them would be a welcome addition to the Board of Directors. I hope you will join with me in congratulating the winners and working together to keep the AAW strong and vital.

Yours,
Greg

