Madam Chairman, President Elect, Past Presidents, Distinguished guests, and fellow members, welcome to the 127th annual Meeting of the FSHS. Like my 89 predecessors, I am honored to serve as your president. I know my father, an extension agent himself, would be proud of this moment. It has been a magnificent personal experience, one that brought me closer to the heart and minds of Florida horticulture and its horticulturists, and one that gave me a better appreciation of the work our members conduct.

I entitled my talk “Past, Present, and Future of the FSHS” in hopes to bring a cohesive view of the society and a vision for the future. I will start with a bit of the past, proceed to review the present year and its accomplishments, and finally, a personal view of the society’s future.

Past

From its humble beginnings at the Ocala House in spring of 1888, FSHS grew almost exponentially throughout the next few decades. By the time the society celebrated its fifth annual meeting, FSHS had solidified its place as the leading agricultural organization in the state, dominated Florida politics, and influenced our state’s higher education system. By 1892, the society had begun celebrating lavish meetings such as this one in Daytona Beach. There are detailed descriptions of the host hotel sending carriages across the waterways to greet members as they arrived at the train depot on the mainland side. Opulent dinners overlooking the water, fireworks lighting the sky at night highlighted the meeting. At that time, much of the talk centered on expanding citrus and peach production to South Florida, which consisted of South Marion, Volusia, Lake, and Orange Counties. In subsequent years the number of members swelled to the thousands with members joining from as far west as Idaho and as far north as Maine and Canada, and across the globe all the way to New Zealand. Our society grew up to be the largest horticultural society in the country. By the mid-teens the meetings were so elaborate that once, at a meeting in Miami, guests were treated to a field trip to Havana. By the early 30s, one meeting was not sufficient. Florida horticulture had expanded further south (this time all the way to Dade County), and two meetings were required to please the large number of members both in the Northern and the Southern part of the state. In 1932, two meetings were held, a spring meeting in Homestead and a fall meeting in Marianna.

During its first 50 years, only three events were able to interrupt FSHS’ powerful ascent: 1) Word War I; 2) The Great Depression; and 3) The famous Fire of Downtown Palatka in 1897, which I am sure you all have heard about. This apocalyptic fire burned down the First National Bank of Palatka, which happened to be where FSHS kept its funds. The entire society savings of $186 went up in flames . . . and there was no FDIC.
During these days Governors, State legislators, U.S. Congressmen, State Commissioners of Agriculture, Secretaries of USDA, Secretaries of state, County Commissioners, and Chamber of Commerce members, were all common participants at the annual meetings, and names like Humé, Fairbanks, Rolfs, Swingle, Reitz, Flagler, Holland (as Governor Spressard Holland), McCarty, Montgomery, Fairchild, Poponoe, Morton, Campbell, and many more were prominent at the meetings.

But the winds of war set the evolution wheels in motion. Due to the lack of rail transportation in early 1945 (all rails were used by Military) the annual meeting was cancelled, only to reappear in the fall at the end of the war. The ensuing years brought a considerable change to our society and to FSHS. With a nation in full recovery and collective emphasis on research, our society went from grower oriented to research oriented. The society regained its numbers, and the *Proceedings* became a force in the scientific community all over the country. Major advances were first published in our *Proceedings* (concentrated orange juice, introduction of new fruit varieties, exotic pests, and other many technological advances). Our *Proceedings* was the place to publish, and dare you not to publish in it. Rare were the papers in other journals that did not contain references published in our *Proceedings*. At the time support from academia, industry, and government institutions was supreme and the meetings in Miami Beach became legendary.

However, the late 1990s brought rapid changes to the academic landscape, and the American society vision of science and education took a turn. The voices from above were loud and clear: National and international recognition became the goal, and presentations to external crowds took precedent over local ones. Surrendering to the ever increasing pressure to publish in journals of higher stature, young scientists overlook our society. Concurrently, farm and allied industries went through mergers, and industry oriented groups formed their own associations. In a short period of time at the turn of the century, our FSHS had been transformed once again.

**Present**

The FSHS of today is a reflection of the sweeping changes that took place over the last decade and a half. A look around at your fellow attendees will provide you the best picture of what we are. At the moment, we are a society of researchers, extension educators, students, and progressive industry personnel, which after all, is a *perfect combination*! As such, we ought to take this opportunity and maximize our strengths and core values.

We continue to publish the *Proceedings*, and thanks to the courageous efforts of Jan Narciso, we’ve been able to extend our legacy four more years. However, our *Proceedings* is no longer the mighty source of scientific information it once was. For decades, few were the horticulture papers that did not contain references from the *Proceedings* of the FSHS. The new academic reality has made publication in the *Proceedings* almost irrelevant for most. Therefore, we can no longer continue the status quo, and we must make every effort to restore our stature for the benefit of our members. To start, this past year we began a series of initiatives aimed at making the *Proceedings* relevant again. First, we began placing manuscripts online 30 days after submission. And let me repeat this, your non-refereed manuscript (in its galley form) will be placed on line within 30 days of submission. So, there is an incentive for some of you slackers to submit on time. Second, we have started negotiations with several Agricultural Abstract Indexing groups to include our *Proceedings* in most Agricultural search engines. This will drastically increase the visibility of our papers that otherwise go unnoticed, and enhance their citation potential. Third, along the same lines, the BOD approved the selling of *Proceedings* online to ASHS members (on their website) at a member’s rate. This was made possible by our continuous partnership with ASHS and the mutual support between these two organizations. To further expand our visibility to out-of-state ASHS members, we will be organizing a booth during the Annual Meeting in Orlando to showcase our organization. This display should help bring us back to the forefront of our fellow horticulturists nationwide.

However, more is needed. To this end, a committee was formed to look at ways to further increase the value of the *Proceedings* and hence, our annual meetings. Tomorrow at the Business Meeting, a presentation on these matters will be made that will require sober reflection from all members. Please attend the meeting tomorrow and be ready to discuss these crucial issues.

Our Newsletter continues to be the link to the society throughout the year. Published 4 times a year (after each meeting of the BOD), it contains not only information pertaining to the society, but it also presents information of horticultural significance in general. With a new Editor and new ideas from Shawn Steed, and the input from all of you, we can make the Newsletter an informative link between members and a reminder of our commitment to the society.

To better serve our members, our website continues to improve, and is fast becoming the hub of our society in efforts. Thanks to the efforts of Mark Ritemour, glitches are being corrected, functions are being added and information updated. In the near future, if not there yet, we are adding a Hort Certification Program online through our website. This interactive program will be managed by our former president Mary Lamberts and involves the integration of additional activities to our meeting . . . which brings us to our most important endeavor: our Annual Meeting.

Our meeting is the most important state gathering of scientists, extension educators, students and industry personnel, and by its own nature, its biggest strength. This is the only time where our members gather, rekindle, and for many, if not all, find out what our colleagues are working on. The student competition has become a vital part of the meeting, offering young scientists the opportunity to develop their presentation skills and expand their knowledge. This year we have more than 20 student presenters and 18 in the best Student Presentation Competition. With the help from our secret benefactor, we continue to offer these students scholarships to attend the meeting, thus helping with the education of future horticulturists.

Economically, we remain very solid. You will hear all the details tomorrow at the Business Meeting from our Secretary/Treasurer. Our colleagues at ASHS (Tracy, Mike, and Cindy) have done a magnificent job for years in our bookkeeping and are in part responsible for our economic stability.

Finally, a reminder that this is a society of volunteers. As Nancy pointed out last year, we would not exist if it were not for the efforts and dedication of the many members that devote their time and energy for the benefit of the society. At the moment, we need additional volunteers to spread out the work and move this 127-year old “dream” forward. At this moment, we are in desperate need of Section Editors to assist Jan Narciso with the upcoming Proceedings, and of section vice presidents to plan future meetings. Jan Narciso has done an excellent job in
the last four years, and although retired now, she will complete her 5-year term. I hope that by the end of the meeting, I will have been approached by many interested members to join the force and assist Jan.

This past year gave me a deeper appreciation of how intertwined the work of all members of the BOD is, and how thankful we ought to be to have these individuals as members dedicating their time to the common cause. None of this would have been possible if not for their dedicated efforts. To Nancy, my deepest appreciation for her timely suggestions. Her messages in her customary tranquil demeanor calmed me down at times when I thought I was about to gone insane. Few of you know that behind this fuzzy and cuddly face lives a man with no patience!!

I want to extend my greatest appreciation to Jan Narciso for her courageous effort in putting together the Proceedings. Often times without help, Jan continued to work alone and tirelessly to get the Proceedings published on time. She has dedicated 4 years of her free time to the Society, an effort that should not go unnoticed.

Mark Ritenour has had the challenging job of dealing with a developing website. Not only does he keep the website up to date, but he also has to deal with the constant challenges of new technological glitches that seemingly appear out of nowhere. He also sends out the Newsletter and all other types of communication. His job is vital to the society, and we all should be very thankful to him.

Thanks to Carlene Chase and her Student committee, we are able to carry out what’s becoming one of the main activities during and after our meetings. Both student competitions (Oral presentation and Best paper) have been possible because her dedication, time and efforts.

When you attend the reception tonight, thank not only our Donors whose donations made it possible, but extend your appreciation to Dr. Gene Albrigo, who for years has successfully attracted financial donations, not only for the social reception, but also for the student competitions and for the publication of the Proceedings.

Along those lines, few of you know that the Citrus Research Development Foundation (CRDF) supports (in a hefty manner) the publication of out Proceedings. They been supporting our efforts for years and hopefully we can continue this partnership for years to come.

The Tuesday afternoon IST program portion of the meeting has gradually become a mainstay of our meetings. This vital activity is only possible with the help from the University of Florida’s Dean of Extension office who funds the participation of many agents. In the name of the entire society, I thank Joan Dusky for her continuous support; and to Lincoln Zotarelli who was quick in agreeing and to develop the program. When I asked Lincoln if he could develop the Tuesday afternoon program, he fired back a message within five minutes accepting this task, and within a week, had the entire program completed. Way to go Lincoln!

Not forgotten is the remaining group of volunteers that formed the many committees needed to carry out the remaining functions. I am referring to Best Paper Committees, Nominating Committee, Local Arrangement Committee, and Publications Committee. To all you members, your efforts have been much appreciated and “my hat’s off to you”.

And last but not least, I want to recognize two individuals I considered my two right hands. These two individuals were right with me all along, communicating their ideas, passing along their concerns, and offering their solutions. They were in constant communication with me and never missed a beat. I would have never survived if not for their enthusiasm, courage and their support. Their loyalty and devotion to FSHS are unparalleled and so is my gratitude to them. I want to express my eternal appreciation to our Program Coordinator Aparna Gazula and to Secretary/Treasurer Chris Oswalt.

Future

I envision a society that becomes flexible and visionary enough to evolve in parallel to the rapid changes in technology and academic philosophy that are taking place. A society that capitalizes on its strengths to make room for the future, a society that brings together its members in benefit of Florida horticulture in general. A society that offers its members the opportunity to grow relevant to their interests.

With globalization taking place all around us at extraordinary speed, we must seriously think of expanding our horizons before the walls of isolationism come crumbling down around us. As a whole, and with our strengths, we are well suited to move forward and become again a force to be reckoned with in the state of Florida, region and across the horticulture world from now per saecula saeculorum.