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**ACA**



**NEWS**



Vol. 12 #2 March 2026

## **Update from the Board of Trustees**

The BOT is working hard to solidify the internal infrastructure of the ACA and promote the organization externally.

During the March 2, 2026 board meeting, there were several new committees created. The first was an official Finance Committee with Dave Fraguglia as Chair.

Jan Benes and Chris Benes will be committee members.

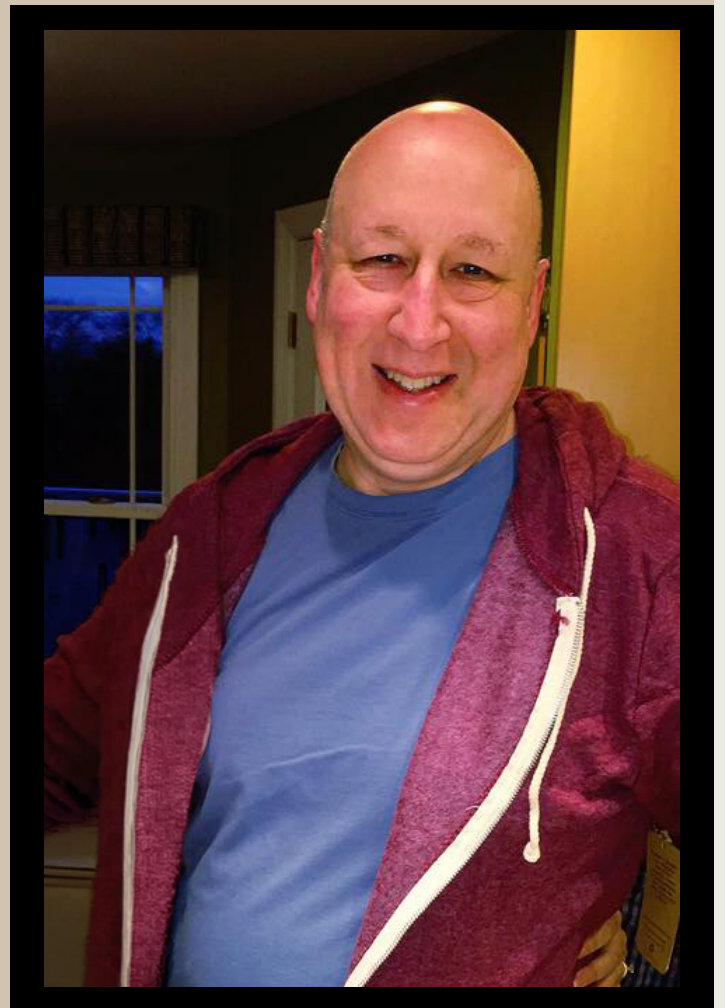
A Technology Committee was created which will be chaired by whomever is the current webmaster. Megan McGuire is the current webmaster, so she is the chair, and she will find people to serve on the committee.

Grace Benes was made the chair of the new social media committee with Art Parola as a member.

Rusty Wessel resigned from the Board of Trustees. Dave Fruguglia was selected to fill the vacancy. Jan Benes had taken on the role of Vice Chair.

## **FEATURED MEMBER**

# **Mike Helford**



Mike Helford lives in Glenview, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. As a child, several of Mike's friends kept fish. One friend bred gouramis, while another kept a few cichlids. His local fish store also carried some interesting cichlids. During the 1970s, the number of cichlid species in the hobby was rapidly increasing, and they quickly became his focus. His involvement with the Greater Chicago Cichlid Association

(GCCA) and the American Cichlid Association (ACA) cemented that interest. Mike has been a member of the GCCA since 1997 and has served on its board.

Mike set up his first aquarium in 1968—a 15-gallon tank that seemed huge to him as a kid. Today he maintains 53 tanks ranging from 10 to 180 gallons. His first fish was a green swordtail, and his first cichlids were a severum and a Jack Dempsey. Today he keeps almost exclusively cichlids, aside from a few dither fish. His main interests are Lake Malawi species, especially the less common haps. He also keeps many Lake Victoria species, along with some Tanganyikan and other African cichlids. In truth, Mike says he is fascinated by all cichlid species.

His favorite part of the hobby is breeding and conserving rare or endangered species. Mike recalls several occasions when visitors to his fish room noticed fry in tanks he did not realize had bred. “I owe a bunch of breeding success to friends who spotted fry before I did,” he jokes. While he enjoys the fish themselves, Mike especially values the community of fellow hobbyists. One way he stays connected is by attending the ACA Annual Convention. He has attended most conventions since 1998. His first convention, he says, “blew me away—I met so many great people, attended great talks, saw amazing fish, and brought home exciting new species.”

Mike offers the following advice to anyone entering the hobby:

“Learn all that you can. But of course, do whatever interests you in the hobby. For myself, and so many it seems, at first, it’s all about the most showy and colorful fish. Later it becomes more about the behavior and other unique aspects of a species, where they come from, and concern for their future in the hobby (and the world). Perhaps most importantly, work to build relationships with others in the hobby as that pays off greatly, and remember that what you do will come back to you. It’s sort of a small world and we all can either support each other or watch the hobby get worse. Those who have understanding with fellow fish keepers keep us going and build the hobby and the field.”

In addition to his work with GCCA and his efforts to conserve rare species, Mike supports the hobby by speaking at aquarium clubs. His current presentation is titled Malawi — A Different Perspective. Over the years he has spoken for the Columbus Area Fish Enthusiasts (CAFE), the Greater Cincinnati Aquarium Society (GCAS), the Milwaukee Aquarium Society (MAS), the Rocky Mountain Cichlid Society (RMCS), and the Greater Chicago Cichlid Association (GCCA).

When asked if he has a bucket-list fish, Mike laughs: “There are so many.” He often browses books by Ad Konings and visits websites featuring species he has never seen available in the hobby. He hopes that one day some of those species will appear on import lists. He is grateful to the breeders, farmers, importers, and scientists who support the hobby and contribute to programs like CARES. That said, he would especially like to keep some species of *Mylochromis*.

Outside the hobby, Mike’s family shares their home with a dog that looks just like Toto from *The Wizard of Oz*.

Mike enjoys many aspects of being part of the ACA: the shared knowledge, the stewardship of the hobby, the support for cichlid keeping, and the friendships formed over the years. He also values the organization’s historical archives and the experiences created through ACA events. Mike served on the ACA Board about ten years ago and appreciated the opportunity to see how the organization works. “No other organization brings together people, clubs, and different perspectives in the cichlid world like the ACA.”

Mike closed by expressing his gratitude to the ACA Board and Cadre for everything they do to support the organization.

The logo for the Bluegrass Bash! convention is a circular emblem with a blue border. At the top, the words "Bluegrass Bash!" are written in a large, blue, cursive font. Below this, the same words are repeated in a smaller, blue, cursive font. The center of the emblem contains the text "AMERICAN CICHLID ASSOCIATION", "AMERICAN LIVEBEARER ASSOCIATION", "INTERNATIONAL BETTA CONGRESS", "LEXINGTON, KY", and "JUNE 25-28, 2026". Surrounding this text are four illustrations of fish: a green and yellow fish on the left, a yellow and black fish on the top right, a red and orange fish on the bottom left, and a colorful striped fish on the bottom right. A small logo for "KFC KENTUCKY FISH CONVENTION" is also present. The name "PAMELA MARSH" is written vertically on the right side of the emblem. To the left of the emblem, the text "Don't Miss This!" is written in a black, cursive font. To the right, the dates "June 25-28 2026" are written in a black, cursive font. The entire emblem is set against a background of blue grass. Below the emblem, the text "Get ready for another exciting convention! Fish Geeks converge in Lexington, Kentucky in 2026" is written in a black, cursive font.

# Bluegrass Bash!

Don't Miss This!

Bluegrass Bash!

AMERICAN CICHLID ASSOCIATION  
AMERICAN LIVEBEARER ASSOCIATION  
INTERNATIONAL BETTA CONGRESS  
LEXINGTON, KY  
JUNE 25-28, 2026

June 25-28  
2026

Get ready for another exciting convention!  
Fish Geeks converge in Lexington, Kentucky in 2026

We are over 125 strong on registrations. We had to increase our room block for both Friday and Saturday. Better get your room reserved soon – the hotel is filling up fast! Hikari has sent the filters for rental tanks and show tanks. Ten 20-gallon Kids in Cichlid Keeping (KICK) tanks were picked up at Dave's fish (leftovers from Texas and housed free of charge by Dave) and now are in Ky. Rusty Wessel was in Texas with a large box truck and he fit them in. Thank you, Rusty!

All ACA sponsorship opportunities have been taken! The American Livebearers Association is looking for people to sponsor their grad student presenters. Sponsorships are \$100 each. The grad student presenters talking about their research is the coolest part of the convention. The International Betta Congress still has fish show class sponsorship opportunities available.

Many thanks to our generous sponsors listed below! Please support them as they have supported our convention.

Please register today to help the host club plan. Knowing how many people are attending helps with all facets of planning and preparation.

<https://aca-convention.org>




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## WEBSITE UPDATE

The new website has been up and running since February 14. There has been a lot of feedback on it, most of it very kind. A couple of things will be changing to improve member experience.

The Buntbarsche Bulletin and ACA News back issues will now be available via the members' only section as links on a page, not as store products. This will simplify the download process. Just a point of clarification, you must be a current annual or lifetime member to access the Buntbarsche Bulletin which is only available in members' section of the website. (<https://www.cichlid.org/bb1>). The ACA News can

be downloaded from both the public side of the website and the members' section.

Exciting news! We will be holding our first live-stream talk in mid-to-late May, depending on speaker availability. Stay-tuned to find out who the first speaker will be. During the live-stream, viewers will be able to ask the speaker questions. After the live-stream ends, the video will be archived for people to view. This first speaker will be available to both members and the public to give people a feel for what they will be getting if they become a member. After the first speaker, you will need to be a member to watch and participate.



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