

A Message/Annual Report from Julia N. Heinrich, Ph.D., President of AWIS-CJC 2009

January 2010

As the outgoing president it is a pleasure to take this opportunity and congratulate the board, members, sponsors, friends, invited speakers and panelists for making 2009 an unprecedented and successful 14th year for AWIS-CJC.

In passing the helm to the newly elected board members, I want to recognize some of the individuals responsible for championing our programs. My ulterior motive is also to inspire the readers to get involved and to provide your own ideas on interesting programs.

Technology: First, the presence of AWIS-CJC on the web was significantly boosted by the efforts of Cathy Martzloff, whom I met at a potluck dinner hosted by the guru of the Princeton nonprofit community, Marge Smith. In the spirit of helping a good cause, Cathy agreed to become the new AWIS-CJC Webrarian. Since the site went live, in addition to providing updated information on AWIS-CJC activities and relevant news, it has also brought in requests from academic and business organizations to post their activities and/or job opportunities.

This year Joanne Gere, founder of the BioScience Collaborative, steered several programs and introduced technology to help build our outreach and co-sponsorships. She has contributed the resources of her consultancy practice and sponsored programs (the Skin Deep Symposium and the NeuroScience Network) to enhance the reach of our cross-silo messages and impact.

Scholarship Program: Each year the Chapter awards the AWIS-CJC High School Scholarships, reflecting our response to compelling evidence that early exposure to the sciences is a major contributor to stewarding and retaining girls in the science fields. The program is open to seniors attending High School in the Central Jersey area who are planning to major in science the following year in college.

Michael Shakarjian, Ph.D., for the fifth year in a row, chaired the committee, which included Jessica Wos, Casey Hoskin, Lydia Louis Ph.D and Smita Thakker-Varia, Ph.D. They judged 35 application packages, including essays, which is the key component of the application. In addition to cash awards, recipients receive student memberships to AWIS-CJC. For Samantha and Amber, who attend American University and Howard University respectively near the AWIS Headquarters in Washington, D.C., we will arrange a personal meeting with national AWIS staff.



2009 Winners: First Prize (\$500) Deesha Sarma, premed at Princeton University; **Second Prize (\$250)** Amber Marie Cox, majoring in Chemical Engineering at Howard University, **Third Prize (\$250.00)** shared equally by: Mona M. Saleh, majoring in the Biological Sciences at Rutgers University, Samantha Rose Sandfort, majoring in Psychology at American University

Samantha Rose Sandfort, Michael Shakarjian, Amber Marie Cox, Julia Heinrich (photo by Shoreh Miller)

Membership Growth: Our many opportunities to learn, to meet regional scientists, and to think in new ways about career growth helped the Chapter to recruit new members. In fact, the count broke the typical 30 threshold to reach 47 members. Membership to AWIS-CJC helps build our Scholarship Fund, and demonstrates the vibrancy of our region. We are one of the most active chapters in the country.



Programs: Our monthly programs address planning, education, career workshops and scientific presentations. Member interest is typically the key to these ideas and our community service participation. By expanding our reach through using the internet and collaborating with other groups, we have attracted roughly 500 attendees to our workshops, presentations, and social events this year.

Planning Sessions: In 2009, there were two planning meetings; one in January to draft an outline for interesting programs and a second one in October to suggest activities for 2010. Smita Thakker-Varia generously offers her home and cooking as we enjoy lively conversation over a delicious Indian meal.

Career Development and Program Partnerships: In March, cosponsored by the Philadelphia Chapter, Annette M. Tobia, Ph.D., J.D., Founder of Dynamis Therapeutics, spoke on decisions that led her to supplement her Ph.D. degree with a law degree and eventually enter the entrepreneurial space, following her passion for finding cures for diabetes. This joint meeting is a tradition that began in 1995, and drew 51 people. Thank you Michael Shakarjian, Ph.D. for arranging the catering.

For the April meeting, Marc Carmichael of RUBiotech moderated a panel of professional scientists and AWIS-CJC members -- Joleen White, Ildiko Antal, Joanne Gere and Nancy Rawson -- in a discussion about their career tracks in the biomedical sector and the importance of mentoring. Marc, along with Zhenhong Bao, is the cofounder and President of the graduate school organization Biotech & Pharma Association at Rutgers & UMDNJ (RUBiotech). We appreciate their ongoing support and co-sponsorship. The event drew an audience of over 50 people and established the first of two new partnerships within the Rutgers University. We thank Smita Thakker-Varia, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Dept of Neuroscience & Cell Biology Director of Graduate Academic and Student Affairs, UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, for encouraging us to partner with RUBiotech.

In May, RUBiotech cosponsored a workshop by Susan Morris, President of Morris Consulting Group, LLC, on the principles and practice of career coaching. About 50 attended. According to the feedback "it was awesome." Susan raffled off sessions of coaching and offered a group coaching package specific for AWIS-CJC and RUBiotech members. Susan is a long time member and veteran speaker at AWIS-CJC meetings.

The usual August picnic was substituted with a fun workshop facilitated by Amy Castoro, Principal at Irimi Group and a professional interviewer. Amy began by explaining the scientific principles of her somatic psychology approach to evaluating interview candidates. She then took the next step of coaching the audience through a series of exercises of self-assessment. The meeting drew over 50 participants and received a glowing review by resident Princeton news correspondent Barbara Fox in her blog, Princeton Comment. To boot, our gracious host Miele provided a generous and scrumptious spread of edibles and held the site open as the meeting ran overtime. In a follow-up e-based survey Amy raffled off two sessions of coaching.

For the November meeting, we established partnership with Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math at Rutgers University (WiSTEM), which generously hosted (deferred October) the meeting featuring Phoebe Leboy, Ph.D., outgoing President of AWIS and Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Leboy discussed the importance of early career mentoring. The 30 who attended were thoroughly engaged and several members of the audience decided to continue the conversation over dinner and wine. We look forward to partnering again in 2010 with Dr. Joan Bennett, Associate VP, Dr. Natalie Batmanian, Associated Director and Christina C. Leshko, Program Coordinator from the Office of the Promotion of WiSTEM.

Also in November, we presented the film "Naturally Obsessed: The Making of a Scientist" followed by a panel discussion and informal dinner. The two prominent investigators Drs. Lawrence Shapiro and Robert Townley featured in the film, as well as Rutgers graduate student Lydia Louis, MPH, and Princeton High School teacher Linda Cody, MS, lent their opinions on the challenges facing young scientists and women in particular. Again, in the Q & A period, the importance of mentoring was explored. The event was hosted and co-sponsored with the Princeton Public Library and drew a crowd of over 100. Equally important, it inspired several members of the audience to contact Susan Conlon, Teen Services Librarian, for guidance on how to arrange a similar program at their respective academic institutions. The event went so well that AWIS-CJC is looking forward to working with Susan Conlon on other science programs.

Scientific Presentations: In July, AWIS-CJC typically does not organize a meeting and therefore was delighted to co-sponsor the Skin Deep Symposium: A Resource for Scientists and Entrepreneurs, which was organized by Joanne Gere of the BioScience Collaborative. About 65 researchers from academic and industry labs participated.



In September, Scott Lett, Ph.D., President at The BioAnalytics Group LLC presented on his proprietary imaging analysis platform and on the challenges and importance of standardizing diagnostic assays globally. This meeting was also co-sponsored with RUBiotech and the BioScience Collaborative. About 25 attended.

In December, to interject some science into the Annual Holiday Dinner event, Nancy Rawson, Ph.D. (above), Chief Scientific Officer at WellGen, Inc., gave a presentation and tasting exercise: "Why Do Holidays Smell So Good? A brief exploration of our scentsational sense of smell." About 30 attended. I was touched to receive a present and thank you all for the lovely clock.

Community Service: On Sunday April 19, 2009 Michael Shakarjian, Casey Hoskin and I donned our AWIS-CJC T-shirts and enjoyed each other's company for the 3-mile Walk for Muscular Sclerosis 2009 in North Brunswick.

Looking Forward: In closing, I hope you agree that AWIS-CJC has had a dynamic year. The new board has a lot of work ahead of them and I hope you will volunteer to drive programs and fresh ideas. I look forward to taking on my new role as Treasurer and supporting AWIS-CJC through another successful year of programs.

Happy New Year,

Julia Heinrich, Ph.D.

President of AWIS-CJC 2009

Association for Women in Science- Central Jersey Chapter

Our Mission: to empower and promote scientists in the local community through education, networking, service, leadership, entrepreneurship