

Message from the President

John C. Wingfield

Even if you were not at the annual meeting in New Orleans last January, you have probably heard what a spectacular success it was. We had the highest attendance in many years (over 1,600) with about 1,100 abstracts – an incredibly busy schedule. The symposia were superb and although the numbers of posters and concurrent oral sessions were daunting at times, the spectrum of topics to choose from was truly inspiring. The Society is alive and well! Everyone I talked to enjoyed the science and the venue (indeed many suggested we should have the meeting in New Orleans every three years or so). It is with thanks to the Program Committee chaired by Stacia Sower and coordinated by Burk and Associates (especially Sue Burk) that this meeting was so successful. Stacia stepped down in New Orleans and we welcome Kate Loudon as the new Chair of the Program Committee. Our next meeting in San Diego in 2005 looks to be just as exciting, so make a note on your calendars!

One of the most encouraging facts from the New Orleans meeting was the large number of undergraduate and graduate students that attended – over 600. Add to this the contingent of postdoctoral fellows and we had an enormous group of young attendees. At this point I would like to thank all the students who helped at the meeting in whatever capacity. It all helps to make our annual gathering run smoothly. Many thanks also to the Student and Postdoctoral Affairs Committee chaired by Shea Tuberty for organizing the special lunch. I addressed this group briefly during this session and I was greatly impressed with the number and enthusiasm of these young people. The future of our Society looks to be very strong. Members should also be aware that the Society was able to support a record number of students that underscores our commitment to fostering education and research development. We should especially thank Brian Tsukimura and the Student Support Committee for their dedicated hard work reviewing many proposals (another record) for grants-in-aid of research and travel for graduate students. We hope very much to continue to expand our support of young members of the Society and nurture integrative and comparative biology for generations to come. To aid this, we now have an easily accessible "donate" button on our website. Support of students in S.I.C.B. depends almost entirely on such sources of funds. Given the impressive things our students, and postdoctoral fellows, are doing I hope you will visit our website and make a donation. We wait in anticipation to see how many students and postdoctoral fellows will attend the San Diego meeting.

During the Executive Committee meeting we discussed our strategic plan for the future. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we have been discussing and developing this for the past two years. The goal is to promote new ideas in education and research from the membership at large, including development of endowments and other funding for the Society, so that we can offer more travel grants, research support (especially for students) and fund initiatives in education, outreach etc. As I mentioned last fall, there is growing interest in outreach to other nations in the new world, especially to bring faculty and their students to our meeting. This plan is now on our website for your information, comments and initiatives. It is not a directive, but rather a starting point to focus ideas from members and implement them.

In conjunction with the introduction of this plan, there are already new developments. The Committee for Increasing Membership Diversity in SICB, chaired by Bobby Espinoza, is now in its second year and flourishing. Several students and teachers from the New Orleans area were invited to the meeting and judging from those that I met, they were all inspired by the opportunities in education and research in basic biology. The activities of the committee were very lively and inspiring. Grant writing is underway to support the initiatives in expanding diversity in our society and I cannot emphasize enough how we need donations to ensure that the work of this committee will continue to expand and be effective. We look forward to San Diego where we will attract local students and their teachers that represent diversity.

Other committees were also hard at work in New Orleans. Many thanks to Wendy Ryan who stepped down as

Chair of the Education Council and welcome to Henry John–Alder who takes over as the next Chair. This is another important, and long standing, initiative of our society that is a major component of our strategic plan. Thanks to Trish Morse a new teaching resource, the SICB Digital Library (SICB–DL) was launched in New Orleans. You will see more about this on the Society website. Speaking of which, there are a number of members in at least two committees that are involved in promoting our society. The Public Affairs Committee chaired by Miriam Ashley–Ross continues to work hard and effectively. The Electronics and Communications Committee chaired by Craig Frank, is active and will be focusing on website changes. I am very grateful for their willingness to serve our Society and our plan is to work with our talented and extremely able Webmaster Ruedi Birenheide to make major changes in the website that will reflect our planning and future initiatives.

Finally, we have our annual round of voting for new officers coming up. Carol Vleck and the Nominations Committee worked tirelessly in New Orleans and since then to put together a distinguished slate for elections. We will vote for a new President Elect, Program Officer Elect and a Member–at–Large. The statements and backgrounds of these candidates are included in this newsletter. Additionally, note that we will also be voting for divisional officers. This is a crucial election and I urge you to take a look at the candidates and vote! We will hold an electronic ballot again this year (although mail in votes are also welcome).

Well, this has been a busy message but an enjoyable one to write given the many things going on in our Society. There is more I could write about, but I will save that until the fall. Until then enjoy the spring and summer, but do not forget to vote and feel free to send us your ideas and initiatives.