

2019 APS Potomac minutes

The American Phytopathological Society Potomac division's 75th annual meeting was held in Rehoboth Beach, DE from March 20 to 22, 2019. The theme was celebrating the "75th Anniversary of the Potomac Division." There were a total of seventeen contributed talks, seven graduate student oral papers, and twenty poster presentations including six undergraduate and one high school poster. 75th anniversary commemorative mugs were available to celebrate this milestone and were a huge hit among attendees. The pre-conference field trip to Dogfish Head brewery in Milton, DE was a success with more than 15 attendees. On the first day of the meeting, the Industry/Extension meeting was chaired by Alyssa Koehler and included updates from Hillary Mehl (VT), Menjun Hu (UMD), Nancy Gregory and Alyssa Koehler (UD), Mahfuz Rahman (WVU), Erin Hitchner (Syngenta), Kenny Seebold (Valent), David McAuliffe (Corteva), and Stephanie Herring (FMC). The Careers 101 workshop was chaired by Matt Kasson (WVU, Vice President of APS Potomac division) and provided graduate students with an overview of what life is like as an early career professional at several major employers of plant pathogens in the Potomac region. Panelists for this workshop were Yilmaz Balci (APHIS), Matt Kasson (WVU), Christopher Clarke (ARS), and Rachel Melnick (NIFA). Wednesday evening concluded with meeting participants enjoying meals together at the various restaurants and pubs in downtown Rehoboth Beach.

After a welcome from APS Potomac president Hillary Mehl, Kira Bowen (Auburn), the president of APS, kicked off the 75th anniversary meeting with an overview of major breakthroughs in plant pathology research emphasizing accomplishments of Potomac division members. Many past APS presidents were from the Potomac division. Additional historical talks were given by Bill McDonald (WVU), Matthew Tancos (ARS – FDWSRU), Christopher Clarke (ARS – Beltsville), Nancy Gregory (UD), and Anton Baudoin (VT). All of these talks highlighted the major contributions of these institutions to the history of plant pathology research. The longest-standing member of APS Potomac division, Mannon Gallegly (WVU), often interjected to regale the audience with stories about the division's past scientists and accomplishments. Mannon has been a member of the division since 1949. Other retired members of the division who came to celebrate the 75th anniversary were Erik and Verlyn Stromberg (VT) and Bill McDonald (WVU).

The second symposium highlighted several early career members of the division. Alyssa Koehler (UD) discussed the challenges, opportunities and progress of cultivating stevia as a commercial crop with focus on addressing plant pathogen pressure. Zelalem Mersha (VSU) similarly highlighted recent progress with cultivating chickpea and ginger in Virginia and described the disease problems both crops face in the mid-Atlantic. Behnam Khatabi (UMES) gave an exhaustive overview of genome editing technology and its promise in addressing the critical needs of future agricultural productivity. Finally, Nidhi Rawat (UMD) discussed her lab's progress in identifying resistance and susceptibility genes in wheat for the devastating wheat pathogen *Fusarium graminearum*.

Following lunch in the ocean front Sandcrab grill (no ocean view because of the rain), Hillary Mehl called the business meeting to order. Erik Ervin (Chair of the Plant and Soil Sciences department, UD) welcomed everyone to Delaware and thanked everyone for coming. Christopher Clarke provide the Treasurer's report. The financial situation of the division continued to improve for the second year in a row with approximately a \$2,000 net gain in the division's account. However, it was noted that the past two years were at the beach locations that are historically good years for the division's finances. The APS Potomac division Financial Recovery Committee continued to discuss ways of improving the financial health of the division. Following the Treasurer's report, the division's APS forum representative, Jo Anne Crouch (ARS), provided an update about the APS division council. One new initiative is to track the career trajectory of winners of the graduate student competitions. Additionally, the graduate student competition at the APS National meeting (now "Plant Health") has been instated as a permanent fixture. Because the meeting was attended by several divisional forum representatives from other APS divisions, other forum representatives were asked to share features of their meetings that are successful. Albert Culbreath (UGA), the division council rep from the Southern division, mentioned that the Southern division includes a graduate student representative as part of the division executive committee to great benefit. At the end of the business meeting, Virginia was assigned as the state to host the 2019 Potomac division meeting with Hillary Mehl as the chair of the local arrangements committee. Both Blacksburg and Winchester were discussed as potential locations.

The afternoon session was composed of the perennial highlight of the meeting – the graduate student oral paper competitions. Seven graduate students competed in this competition: Joseph Doherty (UMD), Holly Packard (VT), Rachel Brooks (VT), Savanna Haines (WVU), Marco Llontop (VT), Tim Chaya (UD), and Christopher Gorman (Auburn). Rachel Brooks won the graduate student presentation competition for her talk entitled: "Spread of *Verticillium* wilt fung through invasive *Ailanthus altissima* (tree-of-heaven) stands in Virginia, USA." Timothy Chaya received the second-place award for his talk entitled "Capturing the role of reactive oxygen species during pathogenic fungal infection of barley and maize using the HyPer Sensor." The last talk was from APS president Kira Bowen who provided an update about APS central headquarters, membership, outreach efforts, and new web layout.

After a brief break, the evening session commenced with the social and poster session. 20 posters were presented including seven posters from undergraduate students and one high school student. Alex Varaksa (VT) received first place and Anna Wunsch (APHIS) received second place in the undergraduate student poster competition. Celestin Munyaneza won the high school student poster award.

Following the poster session and social, the banquet commenced with food and socialization followed by the always entertaining meeting resolutions delivered by Nina Shiskoff (ARS). Hillary Mehl announced the student presentation competition winners and that Alyssa Koehler (UD) won the election to be the incoming Secretary/Treasurer. The banquet entertainment was

provided by Gary Wray of the Ft. Miles Historical Association who presented on the nearby underground fort that was constructed leading up to World War II to protect Delaware Bay and Philadelphia from naval invasion. Several members of the division later toured Ft. Miles following the end of the conference on Friday.

The Friday morning session kicked off with a talk from Jordan Booth (VT) about a new control approach for managing spring dead spot in turfgrass through aerial imagery followed by GPS-enabled, site-specific delivery of fungicides. Carolee Bull (PSU and member of all APS divisions!) provided an overview of mushroom production in PA and described research into the causative agent of bacterial blotch of mushrooms. Yilmaz Balci (APHIS) gave a thorough overview of how plant regulatory and quarantine procedures are executed and how they protect U.S. agriculture from foreign pathogens. The morning session ended with an update from Steve Rideout (VT) about the threat of food borne illnesses infecting fresh produce in DE, MD, and VA.

The final symposium of the meeting was the contributed paper session and included talks from Matt Kasson (WVU) on hypoviruses in chestnut blight fungi, Anton Baudoin (VT) on grape downy mildew sensitivity to phosphite, and Hillary Mehl (VT) on mycotoxin-producing *Fusarium* in the mid-Atlantic. The meeting concluded with final comments from Hillary Mehl and encouragement to attend the 2020 APS meeting in Virginia.