

Potomac Division Gathers in Sheperdstown, WV for 69th Annual Meeting

The 2013 meeting of the Potomac Division was held from April 3 - 5 at the Clarion Hotel in Sheperdstown, West Virginia. The local arrangements committee was chaired by Alan Biggs and Bill McDonald. The Executive Committee consisted of Yilmaz Balci President (our fearless leader), immediate past President Boris Vinatzer, Vice President Bingyu Zhao, and Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Donofrio. This year, we had 78 members in attendance.

The field trip prior to the beginning of the program was on Wednesday afternoon to Harpers' Ferry Old Town for a historic tour. Seventeen people went on the field trip, which included a museum tour and lessons about the Civil War. While this secretary was dutifully manning the booth, she did hear that the field trip was excellent and Harpers' Ferry a beautiful and historic place! The field trip was followed by the Industry-Extension Update; four Extension specialists presented updates: Nancy Gregory (University of Delaware), Elizabeth Bush (Virginia Tech), Mahfuz Rahman (West Virginia University), Kate Everts (University of Maryland). The session was chaired by Elizabeth Bush. Attendees were left to their own devices for dinner—eating at the hotel or at one of the many places on the beautiful main street in Sheperdstown. After Nicole's minor panic attack about how to affix the posters to the walls of Salon C, Bill MacDonald's masking tape came to the rescue and attendees enjoyed a great evening of checking out posters and catching up with each other over a drink.

The Thursday program started with welcome messages from Yilmaz, who has not only been a fantastic Potomac Division President, but also has a really cool signature, like a rock star. The plenary speaker was Dr. Donald Nuss from University of Maryland, College Park. His lecture encompassed understanding molecular mechanisms of hypovirus infection of the chestnut blight fungus, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, and the role of RNA silencing/small RNA production in the interaction. He also discussed this interaction in light of vegetative incompatibility and the role of two genes, *PIX4* and *VIC6*, which were cleverly worked into Thursday evening's Resolutions.

After the plenary session, Thursday's program included two Symposia, a talk by Dr. Clint Nesbitt the "Chief of Many Things" (unofficial title) at APHIS-BRS, the Student Paper Competition and an APS update from the Vice President of APS. The first Symposium, chaired by Yilmaz Balci and Tim Widmer, was on "Recent Advances in Biocontrol" and included excellent talks by Tim Widmer (*USDA-ARS*), Susan Meyer (*USDA-ARS*), Wojciech Janisiewicz (*USDA-ARS*) and Chuan Hong (*VA Tech*). Symposium #2 consisted of four additional interesting talks that brought us new information on diseases from around the globe, to those right in our backyard (or front yard, if that's where your boxwoods happen to be), chaired by Nicole Donofrio. Nancy Gregory (*University of Delaware*) provided an update on activities of the National Plant Diagnostic Network, as well as "diseases on the radar" for the state of Delaware. Dr. Tom Evans (*University of Delaware*) followed with a seminar on pest management of tomato spotted wilt virus in the Dominican Republic. Kerry Pedley (*USDA-ARS*) kept us in the Southern Hemisphere with a talk about wheat blast, and its potentially devastating impact on U.S. wheat production. Dr. Julie Hebert was the final speaker and somehow managed to make a complicated new PCR-based method fun, as part of a diagnostic program for detecting the boxwood blight fungus.

At 1:06 pm, President Balci called the business meeting to order. He thanked the organizing committee, attendees, and the generous industry sponsors. The following industries made donations to the 2013 meeting: BASF Corp (John H. O'Barr), DuPont (Victoria Kleczewski), Dow AgroSciences LLC (Brian D. Olson), FMC (Sandra Price), and United

Phosphorus Industries (Tony Estes). Secretary-Treasurer, Nicole Donofrio, presented the results of the election for next year. Dr Jo Anne Crouch (USDA-ARS, Beltsville) was elected and the 2014 meeting will be held in Maryland, the location to be announced.

After lunch, Dr. Clint Nesbitt who is actually the Chief of Plant Pests and Protectants, APHIS-BRS, gave a talk presumably about sausage, but which turned out to be an “insider’s perspective” on how genetically modified articles are regulated by three agencies, APHIS, FDA and EPA. The Graduate Student Paper Competition followed with five graduate students presenting their research. Ms. Megan McConnell from University of Maryland, College Park, won the Competition for her presentation on *Phytophthora cinammomi*’s possible contribution to White Oak Decline in Mid-Atlantic Forests. Lisa Beirn from Rutgers University took the runner-up prize for her phylogenetic study on the dollar spot pathogen. APS-Potomac Division will provide funding towards Ms. McConnell’s housing and travel costs to present her work at the National Meeting in Austin, Texas. All of the graduate students are to be commended for great presentations and interesting research! Keep up the great work!

The day wrapped up with an update from the Vice President of the APS, Dr. Rick Bennett (*University of Arkansas*). He provided updates to APS’ Initiatives, the role of the Offices (and the importance of getting involved with them), and discussed the latest technology to hit APS, such as apps for tomato diseases and e-Books.

At the banquet dinner, we had a wonderful talk by Dr. Raymond St. Leger (*University of Maryland, College Park*), who not only described how the fungus *Metarhizium* can be used to combat the human disease malaria, but pointed out how important it is to read each other’s literature (pest and pathogen), and the insight that can be gained. On the down side for this arachnophobic Secretary, he showed disturbing spider images. On the up side, she did learn that genes from the funnel web spider can help combat this terrible disease.

Awards were handed out for the Student Oral Presentations to Megan McConnell, travel awards to Catalina Salgado (*University of Maryland, College Park*) and Taylor Frazier (*Virginia Tech*), and Undergraduate Poster Competition to Jordan Harris (*University of Maryland, College Park*) and Kasia Dinkeloo (*University of Delaware*). The Distinguished Service Award was presented to Dr. David Schmale, who could not make it in person having just returned from Australia, but joined us via Skype, complete with a little sign taped to his camera stating his love for APS. Boris presented this award, describing David’s achievements, which are considerable for a young career scientist. Some of these include his service to the Potomac Division as President, and his current service as Divisional Counselor. At the end of his acceptance, he toasted us with a glass of red wine (Australian, perhaps?).

The Meeting Resolutions, composed by Mannon Gallegly, Arv, Erik Stromberg and Tom Evans, were read by Mannon Gallegly and the gavel was passed from outgoing President Yilmaz Balci to incoming President Bingyu Zhao. At the beginning of banquet festivities, we celebrated Mannon’s 90th birthday; Nina Shishkoff put together a fun “history of Mannon” powerpoint, and presented him with a huge birthday card signed by the membership, and importantly, a bottle of Glenfiddich. Happy birthday and all the best Mannon! To quote the, as President Balci put it, “spiritual advisor” Bob Dylan, “May your heart always be joyful, and may your song always be sung. May you stay forever young.”

Friday morning’s first symposium, entitled “Prospects for incorporating stable disease resistance into temperate tree fruit crops using transgenic technologies”, was chaired by Drs. Jay Norelli and Chris Dardick from the USDA-ARS Kearneysville, WV station. Dr. Norelli introduced the session by describing the importance of biotech crops, and how much of our

country is currently covered with them. Drs. Ann Callahan, Ralph Scorza, Michael Wisniewski and Carole Bassett presented intriguing talks on everything from genetic modification methods for faster breeding, increased disease protection, and drought protection. Following the break, five contributed papers were presented. Meeting participants dispersed after final comments by the President Yilmaz Balci, including the Secretary's email tag-line from Bob Dylan's song *Buckets of Rain*, "Life is a game, life is a bust. All you can do, is do what you must – you do what you must do, and you do it well." Words to live by!

Respectfully submitted by,

Nicole M. Donofrio, Secretary-Treasurer APS-Potomac