

# Centennial Feature

## Opportunities for All Plant Pathologists in the 21st Century

*Carolee T. Bull, USDA-ARS, Carolee.Bull@ars.usda.gov*

For the past 20 years, The American Phytopathological Society has benefited from a growing spirit of *ubuntu*. Ubuntu is a Bantu word of many meanings and nuances, but in the context of our society, it means that we have seen a growth in the affirmation of those members different from the majority and a spirit exists in which members respect each other and are interconnected. This change has come about through the actions of many who provided unprecedented opportunities for underrepresented populations within APS.

We mark the start of this movement at 20 years ago because of the clear impact of the presidency of **Anne Vidaver**, who took the reins of APS in 1987. She was the second woman ever to be elected president of the then 80-year-old society. The first was **Helen Hart** more than 30 years earlier. For her 1988 plenary address, Vidaver chose to speak about the status of women in plant pathology. Her presentation made it clear that many talented women faced numerous unfair obstacles that made it difficult for them to find meaningful work in our profession. Her data were based on several sources, particularly an extensive survey conducted by the newly formed Women in Plant Pathology Committee.

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Because many women in plant pathology were early career professionals, the Women in Plant Pathology Committee set itself to the task of providing workshops and special sessions on topics of professionalism that were needed by early career professionals to succeed. Early workshop topics sponsored or cosponsored by the committee included how to get and keep a job, successful job interviewing, and how to prepare a manuscript or grant application. They also organized the first “APS 101” session to teach members how to get involved in the society. The workshops were open to the entire membership. This began a tradition of providing help to our members in professional development and networking that is now institutionalized. The chair of Professionalism for the Scientific Program Board, the Graduate Student and Early Career Professionals Committees, the Committee on Cultural Diversity (now the Joint Committee of Women in Plant Pathology and Cultural Diversity), and the workshops and activities that these and other committees and the APS Council have sponsored are all outgrowths of this movement. These educational initiatives have resulted in the enhanced development of career skills for all APS members.

**Booker T. Washington** said, “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.” The entire APS membership has benefited from the work that we have done to integrate women and underrepresented groups more fully into our society. Now, 20 years later, it is time to see how far we have come and what work still needs to be done. Therefore, on the occasion of our centennial, the Joint Committee on Women in Plant Pathology and Cultural Diversity invite you to explore, in a special Centennial Session at the 2008 Annual Meeting, the work we have done and the work that remains to be done for **Optimizing Opportunity for Everyone in Plant Pathology**.

*This session will specifically look at the historical status of women in plant pathology, the current status of underrepresented groups, how we have worked to optimize opportunity for everyone in plant pathology, and what we need to do for those who still face unfair barriers to their success. A lively and challenging discussion will follow the presentations. We invite you to bring your thoughts to the forum and participate in the discussion. ■*