

Outreach

Great Strides in Plant Pathology Outreach

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Six years ago, I wrote my first article in the *OPAE Outreach in Action* newsletter that was distributed to meeting attendees in Anaheim. Now I am writing my final Office of Public Relations and Outreach (OPRO) update, published in *Phytopathology News*,

so that all APS members can keep abreast of OPRO's activities. In between, I believe the board has made great strides in our mission to educate both the public and APS members on matters related to plant health, plant diseases, and associated microorganisms; increase media coverage of plant health issues; assist the APS Public Policy Board (PPB) in strengthening advocacy for science-based public policy; and promote interactions with other scientific and professional organizations.

We have educated the public by cosponsoring, along with the Extension Committee, Town Meetings, where master gardeners have the opportunity to "Meet the Plant Doctors" at our annual meetings. We annually participate in the Career Expo at the national FFA convention, where more than 35,000 agriculture students and their advisers have the opportunity to visit our booth and obtain information on careers in plant pathology. We also participate in the International Science and Engineering Fair, where APS members have the opportunity to judge and make awards to those outstanding high school students whose science projects have a plant pathology theme.

We have worked to increase media coverage of plant health issues by sending out press releases on diseases of interest to the public. For example, we have published releases on rose diseases in conjunction with Valentine's Day and pumpkin diseases at Halloween. Starting in Anaheim, we have hosted press conferences that highlight issues of importance covered at the meeting that are of interest to both the local and national media. Examples of topics covered include soybean rust, oak wilt, and Ramorum blight. We have instituted the APS Plant Pathology Journalism Award, which is given to members of the media who, through their published work, have increased public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of plant pathology.

We have assisted the PPB in strengthening advocacy for science-based public policy by providing seed funding for the PPB Early Career Internship and the APS Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Fellowship.

Our mission to promote interactions with other scientific and professional organizations has recently gained momentum as we have partnered with several scientific societies, including the Botanical Society of America and the American Society of Plant Biologists in the PlantingScience (www.PlantingScience.org) education program for middle and high school students. The overarching goal of the program is to improve understanding of science while fostering an awareness of and an appreciation for plants.

Some of our newest initiatives include the Dirtiest Jobs in Plant Pathology video contest and the creation of an APS channel on the YouTube website (www.youtube.com/user/PlantDisease). Once the APS*net* transition to a content management system is complete, OPRO will work to develop a new, more public-oriented web interface at www.plantdisease.org.

As I step down, I would like to welcome **Monica Elliott** as the incoming director of OPRO. She has been serving on the board in her previous role as the APS*net* feature editor and is well versed in all of the ongoing activities of the board. I would like to thank all of the APS members who have served on the board over the past six years. Their investment in time as volunteers has been critical to the success of our activities. I would also like to thank current and past APS staff members, especially **Amy Steigman**, **Michelle Bjerckness**, and **Karen Deuschle**, who have been so helpful in assisting me in carrying out my responsibilities. As always, all APS members interested in public relations and outreach are invited to attend the OPRO business meeting at the annual meeting on Tuesday, August 4, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. ■