Howard Ceri Elected Sigma Xi President

Howard Ceri at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, was elected the 72nd president of Sigma Xi at the Society's annual meeting in Orlando. A Sigma Xi member since 1982, Ceri is professor and chairman of the Biofilm Research Group in the department of biological science. He will serve as Society president-elect in 2008 and succeed Ann Houston Williams as president in 2009.

Ceri pioneered the study of the role of lectins at mucosal surfaces, and his contributions to biofilm microbiology include the development of the Calgary Biofilm Device, which is currently the standard for biofilm susceptibility studies.

His experience includes two terms as chairman of the division of cellular, molecular and microbial biology. He also co-founded MBEC Biofilms Technologies Inc., a spin-off company of the University of Calgary, and served on the board of directors through a takeover by Innovotech Inc. and the move from a private to a public company on the Toronto Venture Exchange.

His teaching contributions were recognized with the 2006 Faculty of Science Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Ceri is a past president and currently serves as secretary of the University of Calgary Chapter of Sigma Xi. He is on the Publications Committee for American Scientist and has served in a variety of capacities on the Society's board of directors.

He believes the strength of Sigma Xi lies in its chapters. “The core beliefs of the Society are more relevant and mainstream to the research endeavor than ever before,” he says. “Sigma Xi's advocacy for the scientific method and for science literacy must remain a key focus. The value of science and the support of science and scientists is a message that Sigma Xi can deliver as few others.”

From the President

A Pivotal Moment

Sigma Xi is at a crossroads. The world has changed dramatically from the era in which it was founded. At one time membership in an honorary society was a mark of distinction. In today's world membership must serve multiple purposes. The question asked today is, “How does my membership benefit me and represent my interests, in a way no other affiliation does?”

Most professional societies are losing members and facing dissolution. Some are merging. All are re-examining their purpose and value.

What is Sigma Xi? It is a chapter-based, interdisciplinary, honorary scientific research society. It publishes a highly regarded and treasured magazine—American Scientist. It provides Grants-in-Aid of Research (GIAR) to undergraduate and graduate students. It recognizes annually the best scientists in the world with its senior investigator, young investigator and inventor awards that are cash prizes and featured lectures. It holds an annual meeting for chapter delegates, which features a lively student research conference. It has made science cafes a hallmark of its public understanding of science commitment. It has contributed to issues like climate change, a global scientific workforce, international science partnerships and the support of postdoctoral researchers.

Is this enough? The answer is No. Our members applaud these efforts but have clearly signaled they want Sigma Xi to define a unique role to give a voice to science in society. The board of directors, delegates, chapter officers, committees, distinguished leaders (members and non-members of Sigma Xi) and “millennials” have been contributing ideas and perspectives. In 2008 we will set this North Star as a shining beacon.

Our chapters are our strength. Though chapter officers are volunteers with impossibly competing demands for their time, they remain dedicated to Sigma Xi's role in contributing to the intellectual life of their communities. They maintain a presence for Sigma Xi worldwide. At our recent annual meeting they committed themselves to reactivating members, increasing the number of initiations, enlivening communications with their members and remaining closely connected to their student members.

Our members are our lifetime. They are the source of nominations for Society awards, for student participation in the GIAR program, for mentoring students and postdocs, for leadership development, for assisting with and participating in chapter activities, for nominating students and colleagues to membership and for being the standard-bearers of honor.

At this pivotal moment in our history, let us each take action to preserve our proud history and to advance our common goal of protecting, disseminating, sharing, translating, studying and using science.

We have 60,000 members and only 300 Companions—those giving $500 a year to the Sigma Xi Future's Fund. What if 10 percent became Companions? What if every member made a $25 contribution annually to the Future's Fund? What if each member reactivated or initiated one member every year?

All things are possible, one by one. This Society is worthy of your stewardship and care. It will reward you with its work on your behalf. That is my assurance to you as your president.

James W. Porter

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Student Researchers Receive Medals

Twenty-six presenters received medals and cash awards at the 2007 Sigma Xi Student Research Conference, held in Orlando, Florida, on November 2-3.

Biochemistry: Danny Krall and Rajvi Patel, both at Ohio Northern University.

Behavioral Science: Nicholas Olivas, University of California-Irvine; and Rebecca Buchta, Bethel College.

Cellular and Molecular Biology: Aaron Mendez, University of California-Irvine; Richard Sando, Rider University; Christine Gilling, University of Nebraska at Kearney; and Melissa Kopp, State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

Chemistry: Brian León, University of California-Irvine; Alison Morrison, Santa Barbara City College.

Ecology and Evolutionary Biology: Brandi Fleshman, University of Alaska Fairbanks; Amanda Ruiz, University of California-Irvine; and Elizabeth Glidewell, California State University-Sacramento.

Engineering: Meredith Drennan, Saint Louis University; Allen Flavell, Seattle Pacific University; and Jesus Cruz, University of California-Berkeley.

Environmental Science: Yasmin Maldonado, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Geosciences: Tiziana Matarazzo, University of Connecticut.

Interdisciplinary Research: Martin Adams, Portland State University; Emily Reed, University of California, Merced; Nishank Bhalla, State University of New York at Plattsburgh; and Shayna Williams, Claremont McKenna College.

Math and Computer Science: Ronald Page, University of California-Berkeley; and Arun Mahendra, Tarleton State University.

Physics and Astronomy: Jess Crossno, Santa Barbara City College.

Physiology and Immunology: Kameelah Abdullah, University of California-Irvine.

In addition, Ashley Gravlin-Beman of Florida Atlantic University had the best visual display, according to a vote of her fellow student presenters. The District of Columbia Chapter of Sigma Xi awarded her a $250 prize and a certificate of recognition.

National Medal Winners

2006 U.S. National Medal of Science recipients included Hyman Bass (SX 1955) at the University of Michigan, Marvin H. Caruthers (SX 1965) at the University of Colorado and Rita Colwell (SX 1960) at the University of Maryland.

Other recipients were Peter B. Dervan (SX 1971) at the California Institute of Technology, Nina V. Fedoroff (SX 1967) at Pennsylvania State University and Robert S. Langer (SX 1973) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Colwell is a past president of Sigma Xi and former director of the National Science Foundation. Fedoroff received Sigma Xi’s 1997 McGovern Science and Society Award.

Shortly before his death last summer, Ralph A. Alpher (SX 1945) at Union College in Schenectady, New York, received the 2005 National Medal of Science.

Other recipients included Gordon H. Bower (SX 1959) at Stanford University, Tobin J. Marks (SX 1970) at Northwestern University and Thorsten N. Wiesel (SX 1993), president emeritus of Rockefeller University. Recent National Medal of Technology recipients included Leslie A. Geddes (SX 1960) at Purdue University, Charles M. Vest (SX 1967) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Alfred Y. Cho (SX 1965) at Alcatel-Lucent Bell Labs.

Gore and Hurwicz Win Nobels

Honoray Sigma Xi member Al Gore (SX 1994) and the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change won the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to spread awareness of man-made climate change and lay the foundations for counteracting it.

Leonid Hurwicz (SX 1946) shared the 2007 Nobel Prize in economics with fellow Americans Eric Maskin and Roger Myerson for laying the foundations of mechanism design theory that allows economists to distinguish situations where markets work well from those where they do not. Hurwicz is an emeritus professor at the University of Minnesota.

Their names will be inscribed in the Hall of Honor at the Sigma Xi Center, which commemorates more than 200 Sigma Xi members who have won the Nobel Prize over the years.

Chapters Recognized at Annual Meeting

Eight Sigma Xi chapters received Certificates of Excellence at the annual meeting in Orlando in recognition of their exceptional activities, innovative programming and community leadership during the past year.

Chapters honored included those at the University of Central Arkansas, Natick, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Oakland University, University of Minnesota at Duluth, Northern Michigan University, University of Colorado and McGill-Montreal.

The Central Arkansas Chapter also received a Diversity Program Award for its involvement in the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff Science Fair Expo, which helps promote diversity within the science and engineering communities.

Chapter Program Awards were presented to the following:

University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, for a Postdoc Abstract Competition and Poster Session; District of Columbia, for a program called Key Policy Issues for Scientists; National Institute of Standards and Technology, for a program that involved the NOVA documentary Percy Julian: Forgotten Genius; and Northwestern Pennsylvania Chapter, for the 2007 Penn State Behrend/Sigma Xi Student Research Conference.