

Pittcon 2011

Like every year, Pittcon will showcase recent developments in the fields of chemistry, biology and the laboratory business. G.I.T. Laboratory Journal again will search at Pittcon and other events for relevant developments in science and instrumentation to keep our readers informed about new findings and technical innovation. Following the tradition of G.I.T. Laboratory Journal to be in touch with the community, its Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Arne Kusse-row talked to Penny Gardner, Pittcons President 2011.



• Penny Gardner,
Pittcons President
2011

G.I.T. Laboratory Journal: Pittcon as a non-profit event invests its revenues to support scientific education. Please describe a supported project that focuses on the education of children?

P. Gardner: Each year in the host city, Pittcon offers Science Week, an outreach and support program that promotes science education from

elementary through high school levels. Science Week includes free teacher and student workshops, a demonstration/lecture for high school students, and a grant program.

Teacher workshops are presented by leading educators and scientists and cover a wide range of scientific topics. Teachers who attend receive supplies and materials, so that they can immediately implement the principles and activities demonstrated in the workshops. Attendance at one or more of the teacher workshops entitles a teacher to apply for a grant to purchase science-related teaching materials for their school.

Student workshops rotate through a set of six hands-on workshops that cover such topics as gases, acid/base reactions, chromatography, electrochemistry, astronomy, and light and color.

For Pittcon 2011, we are offering a new workshop for teachers called the Elementary Science Olympiad Program. The main purpose of this workshop is to demonstrate to teachers how to create and implement a Science Olympiad Program within their own school. The Olympiad is a hands on science program to excite, inspire, challenge, and foster the fun side of science for elementary students of all abilities. The Olympiad consists of different events where

students take an active role in exploring science topics related to the school's science curriculum. The events can be scheduled to occur as half-day up to three-day competitions. One of the goals of this program is the application of science and other skills to correlated events that are enjoyable and provide a variety of real-world experiences. It is designed for students in grades 3 through 6; however, it can be adapted to include lower grade levels.

On Thursday of Conference Week, Lee Marek from the University of Chicago will present a special lecture and demonstration, "Weird Science on Fuels and Energy." This program will feature science education in a very unique way so as to capture the interest of high school students.

Please tell me about the grants Pittcon offers to support young scientist at the undergraduate level.

P. Gardner: Each year, together with its co-sponsoring technical societies, The Society for Analytical Chemists of Pittsburgh (SACP) and

The Spectroscopy Society of Pittsburgh (SSP), and funded by the Pittcon event, these societies award The Pittsburgh Conference Memorial National College Grants (PCMNCG) to small college science departments. The awards are approximately \$10,000 for the purchase of scientific equipment, audio-visual, teaching aids, and/or library materials for use in the teaching of science at the undergraduate level for colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The award program has grown over the years to include 10 – 12 colleges that meet the necessary size and budgetary requirements to receive grants up to \$10,000. As of 2010, 271 grants have been awarded through PCMNCG since its inception in 1974.

In addition to this award, Pittcon generates over \$1 million dollars for the SSP and the SACP to provide grants and awards such as elementary/middle school, high school, and college equipment grants in western Pennsylvania and parts of Ohio & West Virginia to teachers who teach science in grades K-12 and college/university professors.

Other SSP & SACP grants/awards include: Starter Grant Awards, 2011 Undergraduate Analytical Research Program (UARP) Grant, K-8 Excellence in Science Teaching Award, Kevin Burns Outstanding High School Science Teacher Award

Is Pittcon forced to cut its expenses for grants and other sponsorship due to reduced revenues in the past years?

P. Gardner: On the contrary. The Pittsburgh Conference has increased rather than decreased its support in the form of grants and outreach programs as discussed in previous questions. In addition, we continually expand our outreach programs to include children of all backgrounds, abilities and educational levels.

Last year's show (16876 attendees) was the one with the smallest number of attendees since 1980 in Atlantic City (16032 attendees). Pittcon lost more than the half of its attendees since the best year, 1996 in Chicago (34072 attendees). What are the organizers plans to reverse this trend?

P. Gardner: It really is not as simple as saying that Pittcon lost more than half of its attendees and what are our plans to reverse the trend without first analyzing the data and the reasons for the reduction. One of the main reasons for the reduction in attendance from the late 90's is the economy. As companies struggle to reduce costs and increase profits, travel budgets continue to get reduced which affects our exhibitor figures, as well as conferee numbers.

Our statistics over the past several years have identified some definite trends in conferee attendance. One is that companies are sending fewer people each year, not only due to travel budget cuts, but the decreases in the labor force make it difficult for researchers to leave the labs unattended. While these trends affect the attendance figures, what is important to note is that nearly 80% of Pittcon attendees make or influence purchase decisions.

The total conferee number for the past 10 years, for the most part on average, has remained level at 10,000 with insignificant increases and decreases. We strongly believe that is a testament to the value of Pittcon to the scientific community; in a time of economic turmoil, Pittcon attendance has basically remained stable. However, what has decreased, is the exhibitor personnel by approximately 4,000 since 2005. (10,728 in 2005 as compared to 6,778 in 2010).

While it is certainly a challenge for organizers to reverse these economic trends that are currently impacting the entire tradeshow industry, we continually evaluate how we do things to make sure we are using the most cost effective strategies to help reduce or maintain costs — both our costs and those associated with exhibitors' ancillary services. Also each year, we strive to add value to our exposition and Technical Program to give the conferee the maximum return on their investment. In addition, we have kept our registration costs and Short Course fees low and continue to negotiate hotel rates to help offset the conferees' travel costs.

In 2012, Analytica, Achema and Pittcon will all take place within a few weeks. Some exhibitors strongly recommend a change from the annual rhythm to a biannual. This would strongly ease the competition with the European events. Can you imagine something like that?

P. Gardner: Since its inception, Pittcon has been an annual event. There is no other annual show in this industry of this size and concept in the United States. To go to a two year event, would be a grave disservice to those exhibitors of all sizes who depend on Pittcon to launch new products and obtain vital sales leads that sustain their business throughout the year. New products are constantly being brought to market and do not fall on a "two-year" cycle. The same applies to researchers' discoveries and findings; scientists use Pittcon to keep abreast of new technologies, applications, research, etc.

However, most importantly, as discussed above, Pittcon generates over a million dollars to be used by the two sponsoring societies to supply yearly funding for all the grants and awards. If we were to go biannual we could not fund these programs on a yearly basis, which would not only be contra to our mission, but also would have a negative impact on the people and institutions we currently support.

We believe that going to an every other year event would not have any positive impact or change on the quality of Pittcon or its attendance, both from a conferee and exhibitor standpoint.

Does Pittcon plan other changes in the concept to reverse the trends?

P. Gardner: Some of the strategies we are implementing to enhance the Pittcon experience include:

- We continue to strengthen our Technical Program by adding diversity. This is accomplished through including sessions that address current events and hot topics, attracting leading scientists from around the world, and continue to co-program with other organizations with similar goals and interests. With more than 50% of our program in the life sciences area, Pittcon is beginning to position itself as primarily a life science event. We will also be webcasting 50 selected technical sessions to make available to all registered conferees up to 60-days after Pittcon. Webcasting some of the sessions helps conferees to alleviate schedule conflicts with concurrent sessions
- We continue to offer a wide range of exhibiting companies and are branching out to reach new markets. We also provide several

free marketing and publicity services to our exhibitors to help them increase their companies' exposure and drive traffic to their booth.

- We also are enhancing our educational opportunities by revamping our Short Course program to include many new courses, new instructors, and expanding into different levels of existing courses
- Our data tells us that networking opportunities remains one of the top three reasons people attend Pittcon. Therefore, we will look for ways to enhance networking opportunities prior, during, and after the conference and exposition. In addition to our Conferee Networking Sessions that have been very successful over the years, we offer several mixer events and networking services.
- We strongly believe that the under 35 age group is the future of Pittcon, and we have changed our advertising to reflect the way this market acquires information. We maintain a strong presence on social networking sites — facebook, twitter, linkedin, and our own scientific community, pittconnect.com. In addition, we have produced a mobile app for Pittcon 2011, and have significantly increased our internet advertising.

- For our international audience, we are hosting a complimentary Sunday evening mixer to help those to meet other people from their countries and to connect with others from different countries. We also offer an International Visitors Service where attendees can take advantage of meeting space, translators, staff to help with navigating the conference and exposition, and various networking services.

The trends that are affecting today's trade show industry may take a while to rebound; however, we are strongly believe that by enhancing services and adding value for the conferee, as well as the exhibitor, will be a powerful tool to keep the quality, importance, and significance of future Pittcon events intact.

Please give us an overview on your individual career.

P. Gardner: I have a bachelor's degree in science from the University of Pittsburgh. My career as a chemist was spent in the environmental laboratory business. My specialty is gas chromatography. I started my career working in our local county water quality laboratory. I per-

formed the extraction and analysis of water samples for pesticides, herbicides and trihalomethanes. I moved to the commercial environmental laboratory where I analyzed water and soil samples as part of the contract laboratory program (CLP) EPA Superfund clean-up. I worked for several commercial environmental laboratories working my way from a bench chemist to organic group leader to the lab director of a mid-size environmental laboratory. As the lab director, I was responsible for 55 employees and a 6 day a week, 2 shift laboratory operation.

I attended my first Pittcon in 1986 in Atlantic City as a conferee. I have been a member of the Pittsburgh Conference organizing committee since 1988. I have worked on many of the committees and chaired several of the committees including: Publicity (2000), Housing (2001), and Exposition (2009). I was the chairman of the Spectroscopy Society of Pittsburgh (2005-2006), one of the two sponsoring societies of Pittcon.

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