

February Meeting

Genesis of a Town Hall Forum: Reasons to Attend a NESACS Monthly Meeting

By Leland Johnson

About a year ago, January 15th, to be exact, I walked in early and picked an empty chair amongst a sea of empty place settings near the back of Whitney Hall B, Holiday Inn in Brookline. It was the night of the Monthly Meeting for NESACS, and as the YCC Chair at that time, I attended the NESACS board meetings, social hour, and an occasional dinner in order to meet with colleagues, make new connections, and listen to as much of the program as I could before heading home to help put my little guy to sleep for the night.

I put my coat on the back of the chair and a cloth napkin on my seat, and I headed back out into the function lobby for the social hour. After catching up with several colleagues from industry, volunteers for NESACS and those who were working on the NESACS-GDCh German Exchange Program, I returned with the masses to find nearly all of the seats occupied with section members, ACS scholars, NESACS board members, and other guests.

I was happy to find that my efforts to reserve a seat had succeeded, and there happened to be one last available seat directly to my left. A few minutes later, I introduced myself to Professor Joe Francisco as he sat down in the seat next to me. This was a pleasant surprise and, as it turned out, a stroke of luck. As the dinner progressed, table members engaged Joe and one another, and the conversation flowed around the table.

I talked with Joe for several minutes about the economy, prospects for chemistry, and my family. As the local YCC chair, I mentioned that several of my colleagues from various pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies in the area had missed the opportunity to talk with him during his stay.

Around the time dessert was served, I had to confess to Joe that I would be unable to stay for his talk. As we wrapped up our own discussion, I asked Joe to come back to Boston for an open forum, inviting younger chemists to attend for a discussion and a Q and A session.

A few weeks later I began conversations with Alicia Harris (National ACS) regarding my invitation to Joe. He accepted, and in August we secured the date, February 18th. As the fall approached, it was time to secure a location and a sponsor. I emailed Scott Biller, VP of Global Discovery Chemistry at Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research (NIBR). Within a few days, availability of space at NIBR was confirmed, and Scott informed me that Novartis would sponsor the event. Shortly thereafter, Scott, John McKew and I invited leaders from industry, government, and academia (many bridging at least two of these areas) to join the panel. By December, we had merged the event with the February Monthly Meeting, and the schedule of events had been set.

The members of the panel, including Scott Biller as moderator, are:

- Julian Adams, President and CSO of Infinity Pharmaceuticals
- Chris Austin, Director of the NIH Chemical Genomics Center

- Joseph Francisco, ACS President
- Robert Langer, Institute Professor at MIT and entrepreneur
- Jordan Swift, Co-Op Education Coordinator, Chemistry Department, Northeastern University

We are looking forward to a discussion of, “The Prospects for Chemistry in the Future US Economy.” Following introductory remarks and presentations beginning at 4 PM, there will be a Q and A session with members of the audience. There will be a reception from 6 to 7 PM following the discussion. This NESACS February Monthly Meeting is sponsored and hosted by Novartis, and I wish to personally thank Scott Biller and his team for facilitating this anticipated event. The NESACS monthly meetings provide great opportunities to network with colleagues, classmates, speakers leaders in the chemical sciences. In retrospect, I encourage more NESACS members to attend our monthly meetings. You can never tell who might sit next to you during dinner, and where that might lead. Networking is clearly a huge part of monthly meetings, and we encourage you to participate.

Advanced reservations are required and space is limited. To inquire about availability, please contact Leland L. Johnson, Jr., ljohnson@creagenbio.com.

The meeting will be held at NIBR in Cambridge at the 250 Massachusetts Avenue site. Parking will be at Shaw’s (Star) Supermarket parking garage, using the entrance on Franklin or Green Streets.