

2005 Annual Midwest Meeting in St. Louis

The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center was the forum for the annual meeting of the Midwest Section of the ASPB which was held on March 18th-19th. In her opening remarks, MWASPB Chair Dr. Karen Koster expressed gratitude to Dr. Roger Beachy (President of the Danforth Center) and the Danforth Foundation for their generosity in hosting the meeting. In his welcoming remarks, Dr. Beachy highlighted the role of the center in performing cutting edge agricultural research and invited attendees to become familiar with the center's researchers and facilities.

The impressive architectural space within the center provided an ideal area in which over 100 attendees could interact and share their plant research discoveries. In keeping with the aim of the sectional meeting to provide a forum for young researchers, 13 graduate and 4 undergraduate students presented short talks and answered questions in the Danforth Auditorium. 7 postdoctoral researchers – including several from the Danforth Center and 5 assistant professors presented their work. Two representatives from the Sigma-Aldrich Plant Biotechnology Development group also presented new tools to assist in plant molecular biology research.

During the business meeting section Karen Koster citing the large geographic area covered by the section floated the idea of having sub-sectional meetings. Various views were expressed such as that having even two regional meetings would help the travel problem. It was also expressed that keeping the current "roving site" which tends to ensure diversity of topics. Dr. John Gray (Chair-elect) indicated that he would survey a larger group by email in deciding the location for next years meeting. Dr. Dick Sayre (Secretary-treasurer) reported that the sectional finances were "in the black". Allan Showalter (Sectional Representative to National ASPB) citing the many benefits of membership, encouraged



attendees to invite new members to the organization.

The afternoon presentations were followed by the poster viewing session in the spacious Danforth atrium. At least 29 posters were presented which stimulated lively discussion until dinner. Attendees were treated to a delicious dinner buffet offering tilapia or vegetarian cuisine.

Several company sponsors also displayed services or products in the poster viewing area. Sponsorship by Pioneer Hi-Bred Int. Inc, Hummert Int., Sigma-Aldrich, Midwest Scientific, Invitrogen, Epicentre and Promega helped defray some of the costs associated with hosting this year's meeting.

The Keynote address was presented after dinner on Friday evening by Dr. Ralph Quatrano (Washington Univ. St. Louis) who spoke about exciting insights into the actin skeleton and ABA signaling in the model moss *Physcomitrella patens*. In a stimulating talk, Dr. Quatrano shared some of his perspectives on evolutionary insights from comparative genomics. He also recalled that his first public talk was at an ASPB meeting in Maryland.

Saturday morning was again filled with lively research presentations and questions. Douglas Sammons (Monsanto Corp.) provided particularly stimulating comments to the presenters. This session was followed by the second poster viewing, and judging before lunchtime. Following the lunchtime

period Dr. Karen Koster announced the winners of the presentation and poster awards. The best undergraduate presentation was awarded to Kiani A.J. Arkus from Washington University who performed her research at the Danforth Center. Three awards were given for the graduate presentations. The graduate recipients were Antje Feller (Ohio State University), Priya Singa (Chicago State University), and Jie Yang (Ohio University). Honorable mentions for their presentations were also awarded to Josie Hugie (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign), and Charles Chen (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign). The best poster award was presented to Noha Khalifa (Illinois State University). This year the quality of the presentations was again very high and although some received awards, the main reward for each of the presenters was in sharing their work in an interactive and supportive environment.

In her closing remarks, Karen Koster thanked all who attended and encouraged participants to spread the word about the meeting and to be sure to attend next year. John Gray then assumed the current chair and thanked Karen for her vision and efforts in bringing the meeting to such an inspirational setting. He encouraged participants to get further involved in their organization and to attend future meetings.