

President's Message

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From the New NEHA President

As I started to write this, my first president's column for the *Journal*, I was on an airplane on approach to Washington Dulles Airport on my way home from the spring NEHA board of directors meeting in Denver. I had been reflecting on the meeting's event and NEHA in general. I was still above the clouds. As I looked out of the window, I saw that it was sunny and the clouds were majestic. A feeling of calm and serenity came over me. I was immediately thinking about the environment, and realizing that the plane I was on was floating through this beautiful natural formation, I started to think about how people interact with the environment. This led me to think about our profession, the awesome responsibility that we have as environmental health professionals, and how proud I am to be a member of our ranks and to assume the presidency of such a distinguished organization as NEHA.

It has been both my pleasure and honor to get to know many NEHA members throughout the years. There are many, however, whom I do not know and who do not know me. So, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce myself. I am 56 years old and though born in Portsmouth, Virginia, I was raised in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where I obtained all of my elementary education. I matriculated to college in 1970 back in Virginia, where I attended Hampton Institute (now University), majored in biology, and received bachelor's and master's degrees in that discipline. I was an R.O.T.C. scholarship recipient and initially entered the U.S. Army as a transportation officer with a specialty in boat and port operations. Later, I transferred

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to the army medical department and became an environmental science officer, which is where I began my career in environmental health. Later, the army sent me to the University of South Carolina's School of Public Health to obtain my doctoral degree in environmental health sciences. I retired from the army after 23 years of service and for the past 12 years have worked in environmental health, industrial hygiene, and toxicology. I have a broad range of experience in environmental health, which includes managing environmental health programs at military installations, consulting, research and development, and teaching at graduate and undergraduate levels. I am employed by Planned Systems International and assigned to the U.S. Air Force Office of the Surgeon General as a subject matter expert in occupational toxicology. My lovely wife, Lorethia, and I currently reside in northern Virginia.

Thanks are the first order of business for me. I would like to thank the many who helped me mature as an environmental health professional and as a NEHA leader. I thank all the NEHA members who have instilled their trust in me to serve and lead our prestigious association. I know that it is somewhat dangerous to name individuals because of the possibility of forgetting to list someone, but I am going to try my best. The following are people who have helped, mentored, and provided me direction throughout my career (please note that the order of the listing is random): the late Wilford Roberts and Margaret Roberts (my daddy and mommy), my lovely wife, R.J. and Annie McClure, Anthony (Tony) Aiken, Priscilla Oliver-Mangham, Webster (Webb) Young, Joe Beck and the entire environmental health faculty at Eastern Kentucky University, Bailus Walker, Roy Miller, my colleagues with the National Council on Diversity in the Environmental Health Workforce (NCODE Health), Ginger Gist, Dan Hammack, Wendell Moore, Tom Crow, the late Bill Hartley, Gene Feigley, Franklin Carver, Frank Gomez, Ric Collins, Jim Balsamo, George Nakamura, Bob Galvan, Pete Thorton, and Amer El-Ahraf.

Having worked with our board of directors, executive director, and NEHA staff during the past three years, I can assure you that you have an excellent group of professionals looking after NEHA and member business. I would like to thank Nelson Fabian, our executive director, and all of the members of the NEHA board of directors who helped me during my progression from second vice president to president by teaching me how NEHA is organized and functions as an organization.

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President's Message

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I immediately felt welcomed on my first day of duty as a member of the executive board. I also thank the NEHA staff, who work hard for our members and take care of our needs on a day-to-day basis. Prior to becoming a board member, I was privileged to serve NEHA in several capacities (*JEH* Technical Editorial Advisory Board, chair of several technical sections, and chair of an indoor air committee); through all of these endeavors NEHA staff always were extremely supportive.

I offer a special thanks to Past President Dick Pantages for keeping me informed of key events during the past year to help me with the transition to president this year. I also thank him early for the support that he will continue to provide NEHA and me in his capacity as immediate past president.

I am looking forward to an exciting year serving you as NEHA president. We have many interesting endeavors that I expect will strengthen NEHA's position as a national organization in the environmental health field and help us weather recent national economic stresses.

When I campaigned for second vice president, I presented a platform of interests and

directions that I thought would benefit the organization and its members. In part, they included my desire:

- to enhance NEHA's strategic direction by supporting its current initiatives;
- to introduce new directions to increase member services, increase membership, and improve our profession's national and international recognition; and
- to ensure that NEHA and our profession are seamless participants in national and international public health while continuing to benefit and serve our members, the profession, and national/global community.

I still think these are reasonable and relevant pursuits that will steer my actions as President. Some of my specific interests for our organization and profession are member services, diversity, students, and the workforce (more to come in future columns). I am, however, open to change and redirecting my focus and efforts as the dynamics of our nation, economy, member needs, and so forth, require.

I firmly believe that NEHA is the nation's premier professional organization for the environmental health workforce. NEHA has been a major influence on my career for more than 25 years and continues to help me improve as a

leader, practitioner, and mentor. I again thank you for the opportunity to influence NEHA's positive development and growth by serving as your president for the next year. 🐼

did you know

In 2006, noroviruses caused 54% of known foodborne outbreaks. The second most common outbreak pathogen was *Salmonella*, which caused 18% of the outbreaks.

A total of 1,270 foodborne outbreaks occurred in 2006, causing 27,634 illnesses and 11 deaths.

Source: *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, June 12, 2009.

For more information, see <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5822.pdf>.