

## ▶ PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Priscilla Oliver, PhD

## Reflecting Back and Looking Forward

William Shakespeare said it best, “Parting is such sweet sorrow.” The emotions are mixed with both sadness as I did not do more and happiness that I did some of what was needed for the time. Being the 85th president of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) was an awesome experience. It was like the dessert after a full career of working in the field, offices, labs, and classrooms in environmental health.

I thank you for allowing me to speak and write in so many places, from boardrooms with leaders to open hallways of the U.S. Congress, in your offices, in your cars, on smartphones and computers, in homes, in airports, etc. The technology for environmental health has burst wide open with so many varied methods of communication in all settings. We have now utilized all methods of communication: Twitter, Instagram, telephone, Zoom, e-mail, etc. The *Journal of Environmental Health* has been the rock, the glue, that has held us together. The monthly columns have allowed me to speak and write to each of you frankly and regularly. We seek to educate, inspire, and simply inform you about environmental health and our “One NEHA.” It has been a privilege and an honor to serve as president. The special moments as president of NEHA and the moments spent together with you individually and in groups will remain precious and will forever be etched in my heart and soul.

### Reflecting Back

We had some very good discussions on meaningful topics in writing and orally. We got some swag and marketing for NEHA, new members, new employees, new board members, and new partners, and engaged more stu-

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dents, faculty, practitioners, and retirees. We touched others in the profession by speaking at affiliate meetings, conferences, and celebrations, and widely traveled across this country and around the globe. No, we did not visit all of you. Meetings were cancelled, mostly due to actions beyond our control. We were, however, ready, willing, and able. We remain positive and will leave others to complete the rest of the travel and speaking. We have adapted and will continue to work with the leadership to honor our One NEHA. I have and will continue to carry our message that environmental health is the thrust and throws of public health. We are the heartbeat of total health and touch all of life, the total global environment.

The highlights of the year include the establishment of the NEHA History Project and Committee; the Sick, Bereavement, and Memorial Committee; the restoration of the Student and Young Professionals Committee and its activities, and a Technical Advisor group that is full of experts with stellar careers in environmental health. The NEHA board, affiliates, executive director, and staff are most active

locally and internationally in environmental health. The partners are active, standing with us and assisting with funding projects and activities as expressed in the *Journal* and on the website. New affiliates are being explored and leaders are emerging to continue this growth.

All members are encouraged to get more involved in activities of NEHA that are growing each day. Individual and group efforts and contributions are welcomed. Donations are up, volunteerism has increased, and funding is secure. All of these outcomes have been through the work of you. Thank you, members, staff, leaders, partners, and friends, for making NEHA better and better.

### Looking Forward

At the time of initially writing this column (Palm Sunday), the forecast for the world is bleak. Since the beginning of March, our lives have changed. Dr. Raphael Warnock, my green pastor, preached a sermon online titled “There Is a Stranger in Town, the Coronavirus.” He stated, as we know, that it has resulted in daily adjustments. In October, while on NEHA business in Jamaica, I fractured my right ankle and could not walk or drive for 3 months. That too was sheltering in place, a change for me. Yes, change is inevitable and requires adjustments constantly. Changes provide a ripple effect of impacts. We do not know the future but we can look forward with some rest, hope, newness, and enhanced energy.

I called for an emergency NEHA board of directors meeting that was held on Thursday, April 16, 2020, to discuss the NEHA 2020 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition. There was a quorum with national officers, regional vice-presidents, NEHA Exec-

utive Director Dr. David Dyjack, and NEHA Associate Executive Director Gail Vail. The prevailing vote was to cancel the physical 2020 AEC scheduled to take place July 13–16 in New York City. This decision was made due to the severity and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns were expressed with the impacts on people, New York, and around the world. The risk of losses of lives, funds, and the reputation of NEHA could be unrecoverable. Notifications have been distributed so adjustments to this change can be made for all.

The priorities in NEHA are being given to protecting the health and safety of the members, exhibitors, partners, contractors, attendees, speakers, leaders, students, residents, and other visitors of New York City. Many members are working around the clock with the pandemic and will not be able to attend due to job obligations and budget changes and cuts. Having a NEHA conferences for 83 years has been great. We will have time to be together again but for now we must remain apart. Future conferences are being planned. There may be a NEHA virtual conference this year. This separation

is just a reminder that we must take care of ourselves and each other now. We are indeed One NEHA and One World.

Well, I have a dream for NEHA. I dream of future conferences in many cities across the country and in Jamaica, a NEHA Hawaii affiliate, a NEHA Guam and Island affiliate, the Student National Environmental Association, additional NEHA scholarships for students, recognition awards for faculty and young professionals, the NEHA Endowment Foundation, and new strategic partnerships. The affiliate conferences have been or likely will be canceled. NEHA officials are very sorry for these changes but we want to comply and keep all of us safe, happy, and healthy. There will be changes but we will adjust and keep the business of NEHA going. I am so proud of NEHA President-Elect Sandra Long who will follow me as president of NEHA. Sandra has been on the NEHA board of directors longer than most of us. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience with the board and as NEHA Region 5 vice-president. Passing the baton to Sandra is a joy for I know NEHA will continue to have good leadership.

Change is inevitable. Coping with change can be painful. Dr. Richard Barbe, my professor and former dissertation chair, gave this advice: “Learn to flip your worldview and see the change from several angles. Flip to see the other sides.” Keep faith, love, and hope in the situation. Make the most out of the change. Make lemonade out of this situation. Focus on other activities. Work is just a part of life. There are other activities we can do such as hobbies, family time, self-development and improvement, school, and many home projects. Remember to take care of yourself and your family and to work smart. Thank you for all the work each of you has done during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your work is greatly appreciated by so many of us. The One NEHA and the blue, green, and gold goals are visible and should remain on the horizon for the future of NEHA. One NEHA and One World. We are better together. Thank you, NEHA! 🐼

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