

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Sandra Long, REHS, RS

Reflections

How did the year go by so quickly? I cannot believe this column is my final one as president of the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA). First, let me tell you again how privileged and honored I feel to have served as NEHA president. It has been an interesting year and it is bittersweet as I write this column.

While I had plans for certain accomplishments during my presidency, like everyone, plans were changed as we focused on the pandemic. COVID-19 dominated our lives, our plans, and the way we function. We have all learned new skills, discovered new strengths, and developed new outlooks.

COVID-19 resulted in a focus on food safety, emergency preparedness, and the function of the environmental health profession. These are three subjects I feel very strongly about and were part of my goals. With the closing of restaurants and an emphasis on to-go foods and food establishments being creative with raw ingredient meal boxes, we faced new challenges. Rising to this challenge, food safety information was communicated to both food establishments and consumers to keep the food safe. NEHA's participation in National Food Safety Education Month in September 2020 (www.neha.org/neha-celebrates-national-food-safety-education-month) was an opportunity to emphasize these safety measures.

This entire year has been an exercise in emergency preparedness and management plans. We have all learned not only what was missing from our plans but also how quickly plans can be adapted to accommodate current situations. We learned the value of keeping emergency preparedness plans current. We

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were able to stress the importance of environmental health as part of emergency management during National Preparedness Month in September 2020 (www.neha.org/neha-supports-national-preparedness-month).

As environmental health professionals, we have been on the front lines of the pandemic. We have been performing contact tracing, ensuring protocols are being met, and organizing and participating in vaccination clinics and countless other duties resulting from the pandemic, in addition to our daily functions. I cannot tell how proud I am of each of you. In recognition of World Environmental Health Day on September 26, 2020, NEHA authored a declaration of support, with partner input, that was signed by over 30 national and international organizations (www.neha.org/world-environmental-health-day-2020). This type of support is empowering. I have always been proud to be an environmental health profes-

sional and have taken every opportunity to promote the profession and emphasize the importance of environmental health. I hope each of you takes the opportunity to do the same.

This past year we have all gained so many new skills. Although some of these skills may have been gained involuntarily, we learned to adapt, preserve, and manage our situations. We have gained additional computer, communication, and home office skills. We have all had to learn various online platforms for meetings and seminars as we have adapted to our world suddenly becoming virtual.

I would like to think of this past year as a year of firsts—firsts that will have a positive influence on the future because of the lessons we have learned and experiences we have gained. While we are all disappointed that we will not be meeting face-to-face for the NEHA 2021 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition, it is the first time that the NEHA AEC will be held virtually. This opportunity will hopefully enable members who might not have attended a face-to-face AEC to be able to join us virtually. With a lower registration cost and cost savings on travel, meals, and lodging, the 2021 AEC Three-Part Virtual Series is an opportunity for many to attend for possibly the first time. There is still the ability to meet with vendors and connect with those you are familiar with, as well as meet and make new contacts.

For the majority of us, it is our first time through a pandemic, which provides us with the opportunity to document our findings and procedures, and memorialize the event for others to learn from. Due to COVID-19, the NEHA Board of Directors has not met in-person since January 2020, has not traveled to affiliate con-

ferences, and has not been able to meet members in-person. As officers and board members, however, we have been able to participate virtually in conferences and meetings. We were able to attend more events than usual virtually due to a lack of scheduling, time, and cost constraints that exist with in-person events. While we miss the comradery face-to-face meetings provide, we know this situation is temporary and know we will be attending face-to-face meetings and conferences in the future.

Serving as NEHA president has been a rewarding experience. I would like to thank

everyone who has provided support. To name everyone would be too long so I will simply say, "Thank you," to all who know me, have met with me, have contacted me, or have silently supported me.

My chapter is ending but another will begin with the ascension of Roy Kroeger as 2021–2022 NEHA president in July at the close of the NEHA AEC. Roy and I have served together on the NEHA Board of Directors for many years and I know he will serve NEHA with thoughtfulness, respect, and clarity. He will continue the One NEHA philoso-

phy that I have supported and that was supported prior to my presidency by Immediate Past-President Dr. Priscilla Oliver.

A heartfelt thank you to our members for all your hard work every day as environmental health professionals. I encourage you to continue learning so that you will always be the best informed and educated professional. 🐶

Sandra Long
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SUPPORT THE NEHA ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION

The NEHA Endowment Foundation was established to enable NEHA to do more for the environmental health profession than its annual budget might allow. Special projects and programs supported by the foundation will be carried out for the sole purpose of advancing the profession and its practitioners.

Individuals who have contributed to the foundation are listed below by club category. These listings are based on what people have actually donated to the foundation—not what they have pledged. Names will be published under the appropriate category for 1 year; additional contributions will move individuals to a different category in the following year(s). For each of the categories, there are a number of ways NEHA recognizes and thanks contributors to the foundation. If you are interested in contributing to the Endowment Foundation, please call NEHA at (303) 756-9090. You can also donate online at www.neha.org/about-neha/donate.

Thank you.

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(\$1–99)

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Letter from the NEHA president and name in the Journal for 1 year.

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Name submitted in drawing for a free 1-year NEHA membership and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Amer El-Ahraf
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(>\$5,000)

Special invitation to the AEC President's Reception and name in the Journal for 1 year.

Vincent J. Radke