In my first JEH column as the 80th president of NEHA, I am writing to introduce myself to those of you I have not met, but look forward to meeting in the near future. Change is on the horizon as my presidency begins without our executive director of 31 years, Mr. Nelson Fabian. I have been a member of NEHA for almost 20 years and a board member for the previous three years, and NEHA will now have a different captain at the helm. Nelson has been the face of NEHA throughout the world and the only executive director most of us have known. He will be sorely missed by everyone with whom he has interacted. Nelson has made NEHA into a robust, dynamic, and financially sound organization with over 5,000 members and approximately 4,000 Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian credential holders.

We have an opportunity to forge a new direction with our outstanding NEHA staff and enthusiastic members, like you, to make our organization even better. We want to continue Nelson’s legacy to strive for excellence in all areas of our organization. Our credentialing programs are increasing in number and popularity. This is the foundation of NEHA and one of our flagship programs. Each of you can contribute by being active members. Recruitment of new members and increasing thecredentialing of those new members as well as existing members will maintain NEHA as a strong, financially secure organization.

Opportunities are waiting for you to engage our colleagues and new environmental health professionals. Like any organization, the future is with students and our newest members. NEHA needs to utilize newer technologies including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and social media to engage our members and the public. NEHA now has an electronic version of the Journal, increasing our presence in both domestic and foreign arenas of environmental health. Our Web site is being updated weekly if not daily to keep all of us informed and aware of the latest developments in environmental health. This is an avenue for all our members to stay informed and involved in our profession.

I have been working for nearly 47 years in environmental health since my first job at Galveston County Health Department in La Marque, Texas. The health department was a great learning experience and it was the reason I obtained my next job at Union Carbide Chemicals and Plastics where I worked in water, air, and solid waste sampling and analyzing the effluents from our operating departments. I conducted research for a new wastewater treatment plant and became an industrial hygienist after the Occupational Safety and Health Act became law. I worked in occupational health for the next seven years. During my tenure at Carbide, I worked on most of the new environmental and occupational regulations written in the 1970s. After graduate school, I worked for several hazardous waste remediation companies and was an asbestos consultant for several years.

While working in environmental consulting, I completed my graduate education at the University of Texas School of Public Health where I received my PhD in occupational and environmental health. Shortly after receiving my doctorate, I began teaching at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) in the department of environmental health science (EHS). After leaving ETSU, I began teaching at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). Currently, I am the chair of EKU’s EHS department/medical laboratory science department and director of the master of public health program. Teaching EHS students is my favorite job, as it is enlightening, enjoyable, fun, and rewarding. The satisfaction and joy is immeasurable as you see former students begin productive and exciting careers in environmental and occupational health. I have been teaching for almost 18 years and have enjoyed seeing the variety of students I have taught making a difference in people’s lives with the outstanding work they do every day.

My initial experience with NEHA was at the 1997 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in Washington, DC,
when I took seven students from ETSU and we explored every aspect of the AEC. I have a photo on my office wall of my students and me at the UL event. With nine students I made a long road trip from ETSU to Denver via Estes Park for the AEC in 2000. Our students from ETSU and EKU have attended NEHA AECs from Alaska to Rhode Island and California to Texas. Many former students are NEHA members whom I see frequently at our AECs.

As a faculty member, through the Association of Environmental Health Academic Programs (AEHAP), I became involved in the student paper/poster session at NEHA and worked with students from many of the National Environmental Health Science and Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC)–accredited schools. I have served on the EHAC council for over 10 years and have interacted with most if not all of our accredited programs. Enabling students to attend the AEC has been my goal since that first trip to an AEC. In the past few years, NEHA has begun a student and young professional mentoring program. This program allows environmental health professionals to meet and discuss the many aspects of the profession and to assist students in internship placement, job searches, and employment. Many of these students and young professionals have support for their trip to the AEC from NEHA sponsors and the American Academy of Sanitarians. The CDC funds the student paper and poster session for 5–7 students for registration, travel, and lodging through a grant to AEHAP. The U.S. Public Health Service officers at the National Center for Environmental Health have been outstanding in their support of these very bright and articulate students from our accredited program schools.

I have been charged with chairing the selection committee to select a new executive director who will continue the great work NEHA has been doing with the help of our NEHA staff and our members’ support. This may be the biggest and most important job I do as your president. I will be calling on you for advice, suggestions, and attributes important to you in a new executive director, and I will keep you informed as to the progress over the coming months. This is an inclusive process and I hope you will be an active participant. I want to express my thanks for your support and look forward to working with you as we move into the future.

Did You Know?
The Journal is always looking for feedback, and letters to the editor are always welcomed! Submit your feedback to jeh@neha.org.

Announcing MY NEHA
NEHA is introducing new membership categories in October!
The new membership model gives every professional an affordable chance to belong and an opportunity to grow. Choose the NEHA membership that is right for you, your career, and your commitment to the environmental health profession.

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