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News

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from SLAS' CEO An Exciting Time for our New Society

By Greg Dummer, C.A.E.

I hope you can stay with me on this one; it may be a bit on the flowery side, considering it is my first official communication with the Biomolecular Sciences Section (BSS) of SLAS. We're about to embark on a journey that will bring us on a ride through history and right back to today—in a back-to-the-future sort of way. Managing change and networking with your peers is as important now as it was centuries ago.



By Greg Dummer, C.A.E.

Before Michelangelo climbed the scaffolding in the Sistine Chapel, and before Leonardo da Vinci painted the Mona Lisa, other visionaries had already begun to transform the world. Ships were suddenly visiting new continents, guided by magnetic compasses. Dramatic innovations in finance expanded entrepreneurial flexibility and opportunities—a merchant in Genoa could borrow money from a banker in Rotterdam, or send a letter of credit all the way to Egypt. New technologies and new products seemed to appear every day. In short, it was a time of staggering change and swift transformation—much like the present.

Such was the beginning of the Renaissance Age. More specifically, I'm talking about what history tells us was at the center of it all: the Rialto in Venice. A marketplace and a crossroads, the Rialto was where people gathered every day to discuss the latest developments, exchange information and catch up on the news. The significance of the Rialto as a

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SBS 2011

Join Us in Orlando for SBS' 17th Annual Conference & Exhibition

By Paul Bernasconi, Ph.D., BASF Corporation
Peter Hodder, Ph.D., The Scripps Research Institute
Program Chairs

More than 1700 people from 23 nations attended the 2010 SBS annual conference in Phoenix to discover what was new in the biomolecular sciences. Participants—scientists and exhibitors alike—had high expectations for the scientific program and were not disappointed. On the heels of this success, we look forward to your joining us for SBS' 17th Annual Conference & Exhibition, to be held in Orlando from March 27-31, 2011.

The 2011 conference is the first under a new umbrella: the Biomolecular Sciences Section (BSS) of the Society for Laboratory Automation and Screening (SLAS). As newly-minted members of SLAS (and card-carrying members of SBS and ALA!), we are excited to announce a scientific program that

enables us to share with our colleagues and friends discoveries, accomplishments and challenges in drug discovery.

We anticipate providing something for everyone in Orlando—sessions that address innovations in the screening sciences; others focused on translational research; and an entire track dedicated to opportunities arising from genome sequencing. There will also be plenty of activities scheduled outside the conference halls to encourage you to enjoy the Orlando environs while networking with fellow conference attendees.

Collaboration, Flexibility

We know that drug discovery is in constant flux. However, one aspect remains the same: the recipe for success still involves innovative and resourceful combinations of science, engineering, and informatics. Since the first SBS conference 16 years ago, the society has witnessed and participated in the evolution of drug-discovery hardware and software,

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PHOTO: COURTESY GAYLORD PALMS

A solid scientific program—and opportunities to network and have fun—await conference attendees at the Gaylord Palms.

SBS 2011

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and interrogated biological processes with increasing sophistication. But, superimposed on this evolution are ideas, paradigms, approaches, and trends that ebb and flow according to market pressures, regulatory



Paul Bernasconi, Ph.D.

demands, and fundamental discoveries. Indeed, some of us have seen yesterday's accepted approaches turn into today's discarded paradigms—only to re-emerge as tomorrow's promising solutions!

Within this creative chaos, we must continue to learn, adapt and lead drug-discovery efforts. We recognize that our inter-disciplinary training—as well as our specific expertise in areas such as enzymology, cell biology, computer science, and chemistry—is necessary to fulfill the mission. Further, the reorganization of drug-discovery efforts in the 21st century compels us to understand the power and the limitations of the different players in various organizations around the world. More and more, the balance and coordination of efforts among industrial, academic, non-governmental organization (NGO), and not-for-profit partners is what makes a drug-discovery program succeed or fail.

Rigorous Program

To address emerging and ongoing challenges in drug discovery, we have organized a rigorous conference program that incorporates topics dear to veteran SBS

members, and also relevant to those with non-pharma backgrounds. In Orlando, conference attendees will be able to choose from 15 diverse scientific sessions organized in three tracks. Each session chair has been carefully chosen for his or her expertise and breadth of influence in the session topic. As a new addition to the conference program, each session chair will also give a keynote presentation to punctuate the recent advances in his or her session. Parallel poster sessions will mirror the speaker sessions and offer opportunities for more detailed and in-depth presentations of specific results.

The first of three parallel tracks in 2011 will focus on *Innovations in the Screening Sciences*. To stand still is to lose ground, and the sessions in this track capture the excitement of recent advances in all aspects of the screening sciences. In alignment with changing drug-discovery paradigms, automation, liquid handling, sample management and detection technologies must be reconfigured or invented to achieve success. Conference participants are welcome to share what's new in instrumentation, reagents and technologies in the session on HTS-to-lead efforts. Other sessions will address advances in label-free, multiplexed and high-content assays as well as screening paradigms and sample management. This track will also feature SLAS-centric material on next generation microfluidic technologies. This particular session will be an excellent opportunity to meet and greet our colleagues from the Laboratory Automation Section (LAS) of SLAS.

The second track will focus on *Translational*



Peter Hoder, Ph.D.

will need to be flexible and respond appropriately to unexpected challenges, as well as opportunities. The solid Plan of Merger that was developed as a result of 18 months of careful thought and consideration will help us achieve organizational functionality in the short term. Since your approval of the merger, the SLAS professional staff team has been busy working on operational and administrative details, filing legal documents, consolidating management systems, and preparing for a mission-critical member database management technology transition.

In the meantime, for the long term, the leadership of SLAS will develop a comprehensive new strategic plan that will solidify the unity we feel as like-minded professionals; focus our priorities; and guide us along a path that will yield even greater value for members. Again, it's an exciting time. New opportunities are now within our realistic reach, and together we will seize them.

As we move forward with these initiatives and SLAS tangibly evolves, you will be kept fully informed, and your continued input and feedback will be welcome and appreciated. The SLAS leadership, professional team and I all need to hear your questions, suggestions, ideas and concerns. We are all in this together as we move toward the greater collective good. Please help us get there by continuing to be an active member of our ground-breaking association.

The development of professional relationships, networking and knowledge transfer can be rewarding experiences. At SLAS, we believe that today, you are the future. And, as leaders of a new Renaissance Age, when your minds interact, new worlds will be discovered. *



Sunset Sam's "floating" restaurant in the Gaylord Palms.

Research. Well established as an essential tool in industry, HTS and drug-discovery paradigms have now been embraced by academic institutions, not-for-profits, government-funded labs and NGOs. These entities complement the work done in industry or have formed cross-functional partnerships to achieve transcendent goals. This track will describe this changing face of drug discovery in the 21st century and introduce collaborative paradigms and resources that enhance translational research. Other sessions in this track present case studies for both "hot" targets as well as translational research topics in non-traditional and neglected therapeutic areas. Since screening for small molecules now shares the spotlight with screening for biological entities, a session on biologics completes this track.

The third track, *Sequenced Genomes: Reducing Opportunities to Practice*, will explore how the availability of sequenced genomes and the inevitability of inexpensive phenotyping are impacting therapeutic agent and consumer product discovery. This track will have a diverse agenda that addresses new tools for drug-target validation (with a focus on RNAi, cDNA, peptides and advances in structural biology); target mining, especially with regard to interpretation and annotation via chemical biology-based approaches; concepts and trends in target "resuscitation" and drug repositioning opportunities; prediction and elucidation of target liabilities; and applications in consumer products, cosmetics, nutraceuticals and agriculture. Most important, the sessions in this track will illustrate how the screening sciences are ideally positioned to take advantage of these opportunities.

Varied Perspectives, Approaches

As we finalize the scientific program for the upcoming annual conference, we are enthusiastic about the range of science and technology that SLAS has to offer. Through the collection of core sciences, novel organization structures, and post-genomic data mining, the 2011 conference will cover a wide range of perspectives, approaches and case studies, presenting drug-discovery target classes within the context of their pharmaceutical relevance.

As in previous years, the program will be augmented by a general session with keynote presentations, interactive discussion sessions, and special interest groups, along with tutorials from a variety of exhibitors. Collectively, the range of offerings will enable participants to remain at the forefront of emerging capabilities in this field. On behalf of SLAS, we look forward to seeing you in Orlando! *

From SLAS' CEO

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gathering place for scholars, merchants and people of like interests cannot be understated—it is, in fact, directly analogous to modern-day associations, conferences and the Internet.

Managing change and networking with your peers is as important now as it was when the Renaissance began. Our new society, SLAS, is following a time-tested tradition in providing practical educational and informational forums for scientists, students, engineers and business professionals whose concerns, ideas and interests mirror your own.

What to Expect

We took a big step forward in May, when the merger of ALA with SBS was overwhelmingly approved by members of both communities. Now, as chief executive officer of SLAS, I look forward to working with an expanded team of scientific and engineering thought leaders to ensure that the new organization you envisioned is successfully achieved. It's an exciting time. The dimension of our collective knowledge has deepened significantly, generating important new resources and a rising sense of shared enthusiasm that are highly motivating.

The next 12 to 18 months will be an important period of transition, and although we have tried to anticipate every possible eventuality, we know we