

## The RNA Society

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Olke Uhlenbeck	Past President
Evelyn Jabri	CEO
James Bruzik	CFO
Lynne Maquat	Secretary-Treasurer

### Newly elected officers

Lynne Maquat	President, 2006
Elsebet Lund	Secretary-Treasurer

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Melissa Moore	( 04- 05)
Renee Schroeder	( 04- 05)
Tom Blumenthal	( 05- 06)
Eliza Izaurralde	( 05- 06)
Elizabeth Goodwin	( 05- 06)

### Newly elected Directors

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Bertrand- Seraphin	( 06- 07)
Sarah Woodson	( 06- 07)

### RNA Journal

<http://www.rnajournal.org/>

Tim Nilsen  
Chief Editor

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<http://www.rnasociety.org/>

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## From the desk of the President. Eric Westhof



As we launch the first issue of the RNA Society newsletter, I thought it might be informative to provide some insight on how this Society operates. The RNA Society was established in 1993 to facilitate sharing and dissemination of experimental results and emerging concepts in RNA research. The Society has a typical set of officers and Directors who ensure that the Society thrives. These are the a President, six Directors, a Secretary-Treasurer, a Chief executive officer (CEO), and a Chair of the Finances Committee (CFO). The President serves for one year but is active in the Society for three consecutive years as President-elect, President then Past-President. The Board of Directors serve staggered two year terms and, along with the President, develop long range goals for the Society. Along with the Secretary-Treasurer, this group addresses Society policy and establishes positions on issues affecting members of the Society. All of these officers are elected by the members. In contrast, the CEO and CFO, both of which serve renewable three year terms, are appointed by the President and Directors. Their job is to develop strategic plans to achieve the goals of the Society and oversee its day-to-day operations. This includes ensuring that the Society has the resources, financial and otherwise, to continue to serve its members long into the future. (Cont. on p.2)

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**From the Desk of ....**(Continued from p1) This year, two very important changes occurred in the operations of the Society. As most of you know, Chris Greer had been acting as CEO since the establishment of the Society and, no doubt, the Society would not be in its current flourishing and dynamic state without Chris's constant vigilance at the steering wheel. After this long term of visionary leadership, Chris wished to step down to attend to his new responsibilities at the National Science Foundation. All those who worked with Chris appreciated his rigorous thinking and his fair action. Thank you Chris.

Since January 2005, Evelyn Jabri is our new CEO. Evelyn will develop and implement changes within the Society to ensure that it serves its members in the best way possible. Over the last months working with Evelyn I have been thoroughly impressed by the clarity of her letters, their precision and the effectiveness in the actions carefully planned and brought to completion. Thank you Evelyn for accepting this position and taking some of the future of the Society into your hands. Already, several of her new decisions and actions are taking shape (including this Newsletter and its contents!).

We also have a Chair of the Finance Committee, Jim Bruzik. Jim will prepare the annual budget, authorize disbursements, oversee and participate in contractual negotiations, oversee financial aspects of the *RNA Journal*, monitor membership dues, and gather information for the annual audit and tax filings. Welcome on board Jim and thank you very much for accepting responsibility for and attention to all details pertaining to our financial and legal affairs.

We have very few committees in the RNA Society. Currently, committee chairs are appointed by the President and Directors and, in general, serve a one-year term. The Meetings Committee, chaired by Renee Schroeder this year, is in charge of planning and executing our annual meeting as well as picking future meeting sites. In May of 2005, the tenth Annual Meeting of the RNA Society was organized in Banff by David

Lilley, Tim Nilsen, Marina Rodnina, and Sandra Wolin. I would like to thank the organizers for their splendid job. As usual the meeting was teeming with dynamic presentations of new data amidst lively discussions. Thanks, too to the session coordinators who have the always challenging job of keeping the sessions on time while not curtailing discussions too much. Naturally, being a participant and listening during those days to all that beautiful RNA science would have been impossible without the help, the food, the organization and friendliness of the Banff staff. And, the cherry on the cake, the weather was simply gorgeous!

The Nominating Committee identifies and contacts potential candidates for the yearly elections. In 2005, Marty Fedor chaired the committee which included David Bartel, Wittek Filipowicz and Nancy Standard. You have received the results of the elections but it is a pleasure to greet Lynne Maquat as President-elect, Elsebet Lund as Secretary-Treasurer, and the three new Directors: Mariano Garcia-Blanco, Bertrand Séraphin and Sarah Woodson. Congratulations to all. You have been elected by your peers in the RNA research community to represent them and, since you were candidates, you realize fully that active service on the board is crucial for all of us. Thank you for contributions, advice, and assistance to the future of the Society.

This year we formally established an Awards Committee to select the winners of our growing number of awards. The members were Brenda Bass, Lynne Maquat, Melissa Moore and Renée Schroeder with me acting as chair. The Society has four awards, two of which are co-sponsored with other organizations who wish to support RNA Research.

The RNA Society, in collaboration with *Nature Structural & Molecular Biology* and *Nature Reviews Molecular and Cell Biology*, awards poster prizes to recognize the achievements of the graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. The poster judges were organized by Renee Schroeder and included Jamie Williamson, Amy Pasquinelli, Benoit Chabot, Eckhart Jankowsky,



and Nancy Greenbaum. The winners for the 2005 poster prizes are Ditte Andersen (Developmental Biology), Amy Buck (Structural Biology), Suzanne Lee (Molecular Biology), and Jan Medenbach (Innovation and interdisciplinary research). Congratulations to all and best wishes for your future success in RNA research.

The RNA Society/Scaringe Award is given to a student or post-doctoral fellow who published during the previous year in *RNA* the best paper as selected by the editors (Tim Nilsen, Tom Cech, David Engelke, Marv Wickens and myself). This award is co-sponsored by the Scaringe Foundation, founded by Steve Scaringe (former CEO of Dharmacon), which seeks to promote and support junior scientists. This year the winner was Ramesh Pillai, a post-doctoral fellow working in Witk



Filipowicz' group. He published a clever study showing how miRNAs recruit human Argonaute proteins, Ago-2, -3 or -4 to the 3'-UTR region of a reporter mRNA to mediate repression of translation. Starting next year, new regulations governing this award will be put in place (see articles on p. 9 and 12).

The RNA Society Lifetime Achievement Awards, one for research and the other for service to the Society, acknowledge the

contributions of established members of the Society. The Lifetime Achievement Award for Research acknowledges the impact of an outstanding RNA scientist on the general scientific community. The previous recipients are Harry Noller and Joan Steitz. The RNA Lifetime Achievement Award for Society Service is given in appreciation of outstanding service to the RNA community. The previous winners are Tim Nilsen and Chris Greer.

For the RNA Society Service Award in 2005, the Committee has selected Jean Beggs for her long dedication to the organization of the RNA meetings over the last ten years. She was an organizer of the annual meeting in 1994 and 1996 and decided after this experience that some guidelines would help. Jean Beggs, together with Joan Steitz, Tom Cech and Reinhard

Lührmann, devised a set of guidelines that were circulated to meetings organizers in 1998. She has continued to provide advice to annual meeting organizers and chaired the Meetings Committee regarding the organization of RNA conferences held between 1997 and 2004.

The 2005 winner of the RNA Society Lifetime Achievement Award is John Abelson. John studied physics and biophysics and made pioneering contributions to our understanding of the conversion of genomic DNA to mRNA and tRNA, particularly in the RNA processing mechanisms occurring when introns are present in the genome. John is a co-founder of the Agouron Institute, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and was President of the RNA Society in 2000. John gave a wonderful talk which placed his research in perspective to events happening in his personal life as well as in the world. John noted that it is now harder to do science than it was in his early years. Because of this, it is important for those involved in RNA research to support one another. From his Cambridge



post-doctoral years, John remembered a lesson 'Pick big but genetically tractable problems' and urged us to continue to have fun doing RNA research and experiments. John's talk was an inspiration to all members of the Society to continue to work hard towards our goals.

My time as President is soon coming to an end and it is a great pleasure to pass the torch to Lynne Maquat. Lynne, well-known for her work on nonsense-mediated mRNA decay, has been active in the Society as a Secretary-Treasurer for the last three years, a co-organizer of the 2003 RNA Meeting and a regular organizer the Career Mentoring Workshop at the Annual Meetings. It has been an honor and an enjoyable challenge to serve as President of the RNA Society during this year of transitions. I would like to thank all of you for your support, for what you have done in the past and for what you will do in the future for the RNA Society.

## An Imperfect Account of the Founding of the RNA Society

### Olke Uhlenbeck



It's hard for me to believe that the RNA Society is already more than 12 years old! What follows is a personal recollection of the events leading to the founding of the RNA Society, based entirely on my memory and a few conversations with Joan Steitz and Tom Cech (who were there at the time). Since I did relatively little checking of facts and the details are fading from our collective memories, consider this simply as a story rather than a history. Perhaps Chris Greer can do a more complete job at some later time.

#### Early Days

The RNA Society emerged from a group of scientists engaged in the study of RNA Processing, a now somewhat antiquated term for the metabolic events that RNA undergoes between transcription and final function. As John Abelson discussed this year in Banff, the group was nucleated by a meeting in Brookhaven in 1974, but did not gather regularly until 1982 when Cold Spring Harbor Lab started holding a RNA Processing Meeting in late May. From the beginning, the RNA Processing meeting had an unusual format. Unlike other "focused" nucleic acid meetings at the time, RNA Processing was run like a giant group meeting. There were no invited speakers and, while all the lab heads attended, most of the talks were given by students and postdocs. Talks were short and rarely included much background. Often virtually duplicate talks were given by two different labs. As an outsider to the field, this drove me nuts. Why couldn't anyone get up and summarize what was going on? It took me several years to appreciate the advantages of this format. (I note that, despite many discussions, this unusual organizational structure has not changed in 24 years!)

Another unique feature of the RNA Processors was that, as a group, they were scientifically inclusive. Instead of defining their field and protecting its boundaries, from the very beginning they welcomed everyone interested in RNA. Their thinking was that any kind of information about RNA could be helpful in understanding the complicated processing reactions they were studying. As a result, nucleotide organic chemists, biophysical chemists and structural biologists who were only peripherally interested in RNA metabolism started showing up at the meeting and finding a large audience interested in their favorite molecule. This inclusiveness

gave a unique feeling to the meeting and was critical for the ultimate emergence of the RNA Society.

As a result of the explosive growth of the RNA Processing field and its intellectual expansionism, the meeting soon was exceeding the capacity of Cold Spring Harbor. By the late 1980's, organizing the meeting had become a nightmare. The three or four organizers not only had to decide who got to give a talk, but how many members from each lab were allowed to come to the meeting. No-one wanted to be an organizer because you were sure to make someone mad at you. The quality of the meeting also deteriorated. Talks got ridiculously short (6 minutes) sessions got ridiculously long (midnight) and, worst of all, wonderful science could not be presented. The situation was acute. Should the group somehow divide into two separate meetings? Should the format be changed?

**Will lab heads continue to attend the RNA Society meeting? Will the Society meet the needs of RNA scientists from around the world...**

#### The Critical Decision

At a luncheon, held during the annual meeting in May 1991, past and present organizers met as usual to plan the next year's meeting. Instead, a wide ranging conversation developed about what to do about the future of the meeting. The consensus was that we didn't want to break up into subdisciplines. Indeed, many felt that RNA science was poised to impact other fields that were not yet represented and the meeting should continue to expand. On the other hand, many also enjoyed the intimacy of a small meeting (and the ambiance of Cold Spring Harbor) and worried that a huge meeting would lose the cohesive feeling that the group enjoyed. A compromise was adopted: we would alternate between a "small" meeting at Cold Spring Harbor and a "big" meeting somewhere else. The 1992 RNA Processing Meeting would be held somewhere in Colorado, hosted by Tom Cech and myself (with help from Walter Keller and Alan Weiner), and the 1994 meeting looked like it could be held in Madison.

A lot more was discussed at the 1991 organizers meeting. The possibility of a journal was raised and a publication committee appointed. The pros and cons of starting a RNA Society similar to the recently formed Protein Society were discussed, but I don't remember



reaching any decision. But looking back, everything was put in motion on that day.

The meeting at Keystone of 1992 was an adventure. As usual, Tom Cech was a wonder. He somehow convinced Keystone that we were a real organization and 300 plus people were actually going to show up on the last week of May. (It probably helped that they had a lot of empty rooms during the dead period after skiing season and before the summer season.) I remember that we worried a lot about how much to charge for the meeting. Keystone's rate per person depended on the number of attendees and we had no idea how many would come to this new location. By making the conservative assumption that 350 would come, we could charge a fee similar to the previous year at Cold Spring Harbor. Instead, attendance jumped to about 500 and suddenly we were flush with extra money. This led to sumptuous upgrades at the coffee breaks and a surplus that helped finance the 1994 Madison meeting. In addition to this financial success, everyone was delighted that attendance was not restricted (but not happy that it had snowed). Importantly, the feeling of cohesiveness had not been lost with the larger group. Thus, the RNA Processing Meeting had successfully departed from Cold Spring Harbor.

**the Society acts as an intellectual "home" in a scientific world that is often large and impersonal**

### **Birth of the Society**

In early 1993, we hit a snag. The surplus from the 1992 meeting was in a bank account in Boulder in the name of the meeting organizers. In the eyes of the government this might represent personal income and be subject to federal and state income taxes. (Tom and I never told Walter and Alan about this.) Thus, we had to form a non-profit organization. For a small fee a local lawyer drew up papers incorporating the RNA Society as a non-profit entity in the State of Colorado as of Jan 27, 1993. Tom Cech was President, I was Secretary/Treasurer and Joan Steitz, who was on sabbatical in Boulder at the time, was made Vice-President and President-"Elect". We celebrated over a bottle of Chardonnay on my deck soon afterward. It was pretty informal, but we had safeguarded the meeting funds and the RNA Society was born.

Defining the formal organizational structure of the RNA Society and the critical appointment of Chris Greer as CEO occurred at a special meeting during the 1993 RNA Processing meeting at Cold Spring Harbor. Bylaws were subsequently written and elections held for council members and officers for the following year. By

1994, the Society was fully launched and the Madison meeting was termed "The RNA Processing Meeting of the RNA Society". By 1996 the meeting left Cold Spring Harbor for good and the Madison meeting that year was "The First Annual Meeting of the RNA Society". Cold Spring Harbor continued to have a more focused meeting on RNA processing. In 1995 *RNA* was started through the efforts of many, especially Tim Nilsen, but that's another story.

**The challenge for the next decade will be to maintain our cohesiveness**

### **Why have a Society Anyway?**

Looking back, I think the founding of the Society was the inevitable consequence of a cohesive group of individuals wanting to formalize something important that they had created together. One part of it was our excitement about the field itself. There was a collective vision that RNA science was just beginning to take off and that it would soon have a major impact on all of modern biology. Another part was that we wanted to preserve the democratic culture and the sense of inclusiveness. Another was to have a formal way to include and interact with RNA scientists from all over the world. Finally, by becoming a Society we could run "our" meeting and publish "our" journal. Subsequently, it has become clear that having a Society can help its members. As Abelson pointed out, the Society acts as an intellectual "home" in a scientific world that is often large and impersonal. Many of us work at Universities that only have a few individuals who can understand and appreciate our research. We would feel isolated without the support of RNA scientists at other places. Sometimes Society members at other Universities can tell our administrators that we really are good at what we do. In a sense, we are a group of colleagues who not only do experiments for each other's edification and entertainment, but also try to maintain high standards and help one another professionally.

The RNA Society started for all the same good reasons that other scientific societies start. The challenge for the next decade will be to maintain our cohesiveness and not, like some societies, degenerate into an ill-defined organization that simply collects dues and people put its name on their CVs to show that they are serious players. (If that happens, I'll resign.) This will not be trivial. Many of the individuals involved in founding our Society are no longer able to give it as much attention as before, either because they have other important responsibilities or because they are nearing the end of their careers. The next generation has already



Begun to take over. Another problem is that RNA science has become so successful that it is part of the mainstream of modern Molecular Biology. It is even featured in TV science programs. There are many competing meetings and Journals. Will lab heads continue to attend the RNA Society meeting? Will the Society meet the needs of RNA scientists from around

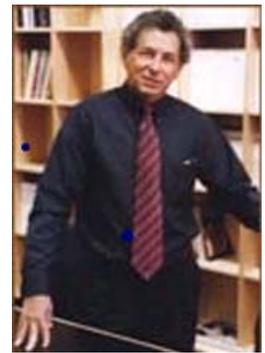
the world, not just in the US and Canada? Will *RNA*, which has seen its ranking climb steeply in recent years, continue to grow in usefulness and reputation? Most importantly, will the youngest generation of students and postdocs grow to feel that they too are integral to the Society and its future? I will be watching with great interest.

The editor appreciates receiving letters, articles and historical perspectives suitable for publication from Society members regarding public or scientific issues, or commenting on magazine articles. These should be sent via Email to the editor. All submissions must contain the writer's address and telephone number. The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions.

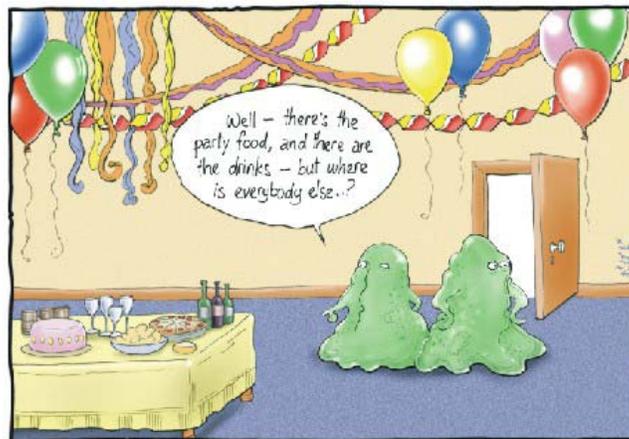
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## A Proposal Tom Blumenthal

I would like to get the membership's opinion on the possibility of going to alternate year meetings of the full RNA Society. Many of us have RNA meetings in our specialty every other year, the Cold Spring Harbor Meeting on Eukaryotic mRNA Processing for example. Many have therefore chosen to attend the RNA Society Meeting only in those years that they do not have the more specialized meetings. This has reduced attendance from people in the areas that have the specialized meetings. Furthermore, because each of us can only go to so many meetings it has meant that we have had to miss the RNA Society Meeting, which we would rather not have to do. I would therefore like to propose a model based on what the *C. elegans* community has done for many years: having the big meeting every other year, with local or specialized meetings on the alternate years. I am hoping people will write to the newsletter with arguments for and against this idea. Then if there appears to be some support for it, we can poll the membership in a more formal way. In any case, this idea would not be put into effect until after the currently planned meetings, which end in 2009. It would mean no RNA Society Meeting in 2010 at the earliest.



Please feel free to Email comments/rebuttals to this perspective to the News Letter ([peculisb@missouri.edu](mailto:peculisb@missouri.edu)). All appropriate comments will be considered and some published in the next issue. This is your Society and your meeting.



EARLY LIFE FORMS  
...At the 'off-year' of the RNA meeting

## From the CEO's desk Evelyn Jabri



It's been a busy nine months for me and the RNA Society so I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on what has taken shape so far, and to discuss the new benefits we have in store for you.

If you attended the annual meeting in Banff you may recall that I promised to keep the society relevant and of value to its members. In keeping with this promise I have initiated a few changes, which I hope you will find exciting and improve the society.

Many important decisions about the society are made at our annual board meeting when the President, Directors and officers of the RNA society come together at the annual meeting to discuss the budget for upcoming year, the society journal and its publisher, and our membership. These board meetings are open to all members. This year Jim Bruzik, our CFO, presented the budget for 2006, which was approved. Tim Nilsen talked about our society journal, *RNA*, and Directors agreed to continue our successful relationship with Cold Spring Harbor Press (CSHP). After the Banff meeting, a flurry of emails and phone conversations between CSHP, Tim and I resulted in a new contract and some great news for our members (please see page 9). The Directors also agreed to extend our contract with FASEB to continue the management of our membership for another two years.

We also discussed society-based initiatives aimed at improving services to our more than 850 members. How did we decide what we needed? It started with your anonymous feedback from our eBallot, a successful move towards a streamlined voting process. By using the electronic system, we saved money and improved voter turnout. The 54 % of you who did vote had the opportunity to guide the activities of the Society with your feedback. Using your suggestions, I developed a plan to meet your needs, and presented it to the Directors and officers. Here's what we have implemented in the last few months.

You told us the Society required better ways to communicate with its members. This suggestion inspired us to generate a Society newsletter. I thank Brenda Peculis, who volunteered to help me develop this newsletter, and to act as the contact person for those wishing to contribute content. This newsletter, which

will be emailed to you twice a year, will become a great means to disseminate information to our members, and act as a forum to discuss issues affecting the Society and RNA science. If something in this newsletter inspires dialogue with your colleagues, please send us your opinion. I also encourage the graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to write to us with issues that affect them. On page 14, Jason Underwood, a former graduate student in Doug Black's lab, enlightens us on life after the Ph.D. Thanks to all who contributed to this issue.

The website is not new but with a lot of work from Fabrice Jossinet, the volunteer 'webmaster' and assistant professor in the Department led by Eric Westhof, we will make it more informative to you and anyone interested in the RNA Society. Fabrice had a busy summer moving the website to a new server and installing new pages. The latest addition is our Employment and Careers website where members can post their job openings. It's a great opportunity to catch the eye of those interested in RNA science. If you have an opening, please complete the eJobs form at the end of this newsletter. The Employment and Careers website also has useful career links for the junior members of the society.

As Eric Westhof noted, the society has many awards that recognize members in all stages of their career. Information about all of them, including qualifications, application forms (if relevant), and deadlines will soon appear on an Awards and Fellowships web page. This year the RNA Society/Scaringe Award was revamped to



make it open to all graduate students and postdocs in the society. Additional information about these changes can be found on page 12.

Did you know that the RNA Society uses a portion of your membership dues to sponsor travel fellowship to other RNA-related meetings? We can also help you launch a new meeting in an emerging area of RNA research. If you are organizing a conference please read the article about Travel Fellowships on page 11. Society has already supported five meetings this year.

As a final note, you should know that the President, Directors and offices attend the annual Meetings Committee meeting where we discuss past, present and future meetings. The meetings program is doing well and Jim and I will head to Seattle in mid-August to begin the detailed planning for RNA2006. Welcome Betsy Goodwin as the new chair of the Meeting Committee. Betsy will work with Jim and me to ensure the continued success of our meetings. Jim has agreed to oversee corporate sponsorship (see page 8) and we hope that such funds will allow us the flexibility to do more

for you at the meetings. You have asked for member discounts to attend RNA2006, and we are investigating ways to make this possible. Tom Blumenthal has proposed a radical change to our annual meeting and I encourage you to read about his suggestion in this newsletter (page 6). This idea is open for discussion and we will publish your opinions in the February newsletter (submission deadline, Jan 16 2006).

I hope that you see the value of being a member of the RNA Society and I encourage you to renew your membership for 2006. A renewal form is provided at the end of this bulletin. Please also share the good news about the Society with your colleagues and encourage them to become members. I think we have a lot to offer new members and they in turn will bring new ideas into our community, which will improve and elevate RNA science.

As always, I welcome any comments and recommendations. Furthermore, if you wish to get involved in any of these projects or begin new ones, please email me at [e.jabri@natureny.com](mailto:e.jabri@natureny.com).

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### From the CFO's desk Jim Bruzik

Thank you to all of the RNA Society members that made RNA 2005 in Banff, Alberta such a success! In addition to the great scientific sessions, the location also seems to lend itself to a lot of informal interactions. Much like the setting at Cold Spring Harbor, the campus-like feel at the Banff Centre is very conducive to discussions centering on the results presented as well as catching up with old friends and setting up new collaborations. The Society was able to keep the registration costs for this meeting reasonable and at the same time, maintain the meeting budget in the black. As a non-profit organization, this allows us to provide new services and discounts to our members. Corporate meeting sponsorship is a large factor in the ability of the Society to continue this approach. If any members have information relating to potential corporate sponsors for the annual meeting, please forward these contacts to me via e-mail ([jxb83@po.cwru.edu](mailto:jxb83@po.cwru.edu)). I am compiling a list of potential sponsors and I am very interested in making it as complete as possible. All of this is in preparation for RNA 2006 in Seattle as well as the subsequent meetings in Madison (2007) and Berlin (2008). The better we as a group can do in identifying sponsors, the more likely we can maintain future meeting budgets that minimize the costs associated with attending.



## The RNA Journal '05 Tim Nilsen



With the advent of this newsletter, it is an opportune time to review the health and welfare of the RNA journal, now in its eleventh year of publication.

As outlined below, the journal is doing well, both scientifically and financially. On the scientific front, we continue to receive and publish very high quality papers. This is reflected in the latest (2004) ISI statistics. *RNA* had an Impact Factor of 5.84 which placed the journal 217<sup>th</sup> of 5968 total journals ranked. *RNA* is now ranked above such journals as *JMB* (235), *J. Virol.* (249) and *Biochemistry* (421). We also have an excellent immediacy index (147/5968), a measure of the speed with which published papers are cited.

These statistics, which we expect to improve in the coming years result primarily from continued support of the journal by authors contributing their highly significant results. Special thanks to the Deputy and Associate Editors who conscientiously maintain our standards, the publisher (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press) which has greatly improved our presentation and on line access and Ann Marie Micenmacher, who makes the journal run.

On the financial side, *RNA* now shows a modest profit after many years of being in the red with our previous publisher. The credit goes largely to Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, which has increased our presence in libraries and has been successful in attracting advertising. We are pleased with the results to date, but there are still some libraries that do not subscribe to *RNA*. It would be a great help if you could determine if your library subscribes. If they do not,

encourage your librarian to remedy the situation, perhaps by citing some of the statistics listed above. We are extremely pleased that our relationship with Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press will continue; the Society and the Press have recently renewed our publication agreement for an additional five years beginning in '06.

We are also pleased that our financial status now lets us reduce publication costs for members of the Society. Our ultimate goal is to eliminate these costs entirely; however, this is not yet possible. As a beginning, members of the Society will receive a 50% discount on the first color figure; this policy will be implemented with the first issue of volume 12 (January '06). In addition, the vast majority of nuisance charges (e.g. proof correction) will be eliminated. We are also in the process of instituting an "open access" option similar to that offered by *PNAS*; i.e. for \$1500 an article can be made immediately available to everyone whether or not they subscribe.

### New in '06

In addition to the open access option and color discounts, *RNA* will adopt a new electronic manuscript handling system called BenchPress from HighWire. The system, customized to *RNA's* specific needs will provide state of the art manuscript and review tracking as well as consolidated record keeping.

We are also considering establishing and maintaining electronic bulletin boards which could serve as a forum for discussion of controversial topics, (e.g. is there translation in the nucleus?) and/or exchange of methods and troubleshooting. Your feedback is needed to determine the interest in such electronic forums and the exact form they should take. We also welcome suggestions on any aspect of the journal including suggestions for topics that need a current review. In this regard, we always encourage volunteers who may wish to write a review or mini-review.

## FAQs

**Q What is the percentage of manuscripts accepted at *RNA*?**

**A** At the current time, approximately 30% of submitted manuscripts are accepted "as is" or with relatively minor revision. An additional 30% require major revision including the addition of substantive experimental data and are eventually published. Approximately 40% are declined outright and not encouraged to resubmit.

**Q Does *RNA* consider reviews from other journals?**

**A** Yes, we do. Some of our best papers have come from exceptionally highly selective journals and were declined by those journals as "not being of general interest". It often can save considerable amounts of time if authors inquire prior to submission to *RNA* if their paper has been reviewed elsewhere.

**Q I want to submit to *RNA* but I cannot afford the publication charges. What should I do?**

**A** Submit. We do not want to miss papers because of financial issues. In exceptional circumstances, the editor can waive certain charges.

**Q My paper is very biological but *RNA* only publishes mechanism. Where should I submit?**

**A** *RNA*. It is true that we publish a large number of mechanistic papers but that is because those are the papers submitted. We welcome and encourage the submission of papers that focus on cell biology, RNA localization, etc.

**Q But isn't *RNA* a splicing journal?**

**A** Nothing could be farther from the truth; in any issue, splicing represents a relatively small percentage of papers published.

**Q Why should I publish in *RNA*?**

**A** There are several reasons to publish in *RNA*. First, the editors ensure that the review process is fast and fair. You can be confident that the paper will be reviewed by experts in the specific area of submission and that the editors are open to discussion should you feel unfairly treated. Second, your paper will be seen by an audience most suited to read it. Even in these days of internet accessibility, papers can be "lost" in the vast sea of publications out there. Third, because we are a Society journal, the editors are responsive to the membership.

## Travel Fellowships and Meeting Support

Did you know that your membership dues support student travel fellowships and help launch new RNA-related meetings?

RNA Society can provide fellowships (\$500-1000) to the organizers of a meeting to support the attendance of students or postdoctoral fellows. It's up to the organizers to decide how they will use these funds to help the junior folks (support one versus support multiple with smaller fellowships), but the RNA Society will need a statement outlining your plans for the funds at the time of the request.

The Society can also help organizers launch a new meeting (one that has never been organized before), by providing an interest-free loan. The sum is negotiable and depends on what the organizers feel they can repay. In general, the Society would support the launch of a

new meeting for 1-2 years but the organizers will have to develop a plan to obtain other support after 2 years. If you wish to pursue this option, we will need a proposal outlining why the loan is necessary, how the money will be used, how the organizers will repay the loan to the RNA Society, and the plans for making the meeting self-supporting in the future.

The RNA Society asks that the organizers display our logo on the meeting website and in the abstract book as an indication of our support. Also, the organizers are invited to write a summary (~500 words) of the meeting to be included in the Newsletter. This is an ideal opportunity to promote your favorite area of research.

If you are a meeting organizer interested in obtaining support for your RNA-related meeting, please contact Evelyn Jabri.

The Society was pleased to provide Fellowships and/or poster prizes at the following meetings in 2005:

### **ISMB2005: Alternative Splicing Special Interest Group**

June 23-24, 2005, Detroit, Michigan

Organizers: Christopher Lee, Shoba Ranganathan, Stefan Stamm, Hui Wang

Winners: Ji-Ann Lee, Bing-Bing Wang & Yi-Xing

### **Helicases and NTP driven nucleic acid machines: Structure - Function - Diseases**

July 5 - 10, 2005, Arolla, Switzerland

Organizers: Patrick Linder & Stephen Kowalczykowski

Winners: Sophie Dumont & Barak Akabayov

### ***BBSRC workshop: Mechanism & Control of Posttranscriptional Gene Expression***

July 8-10, 2005, New York, NY

Organizers: John McCarthy, Lynne Maquat and Mike Kiledjian

Winners: Thomas Martin Schmeing & Takyar (Shervin) Seyedtaghi

### ***Western Canada RNA Conference (aka RiboWest 2005)***

July 25-27, 2005, Prince George, BC, Canada

Organizers: Stephen Rader,

Winners: Alexander Ebhardt, Sunny Wang, Matthew Lau, Paula Burke, Sepehr Alamouti, Heath de la Giroday

### ***Coming in 2005:***

#### ***Symposium on RNA Biology VI: RNA, Tool and Target; Small RNAs and RNPs***

October 21-22, 2005, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina

Organizers: Stu Maxwell (chair), Paul Agris, Bernard Brown, Mariano Garcia-Blanco, Traci Hall, Eric Wagner

### ***Upcoming in 2006:***

#### ***16<sup>th</sup> Penn State Plant Physiology Symposium: RNA Biology: Novel Insights from Plant Systems***

May 18-20, 2006, University Park, PA



## Graduate Student / Postdoc Pages

These pages are written for, to, and in some cases by our younger RNA Scientists. However the information, opinions and experiences here are by no means exclusive to this group. We are encouraging submissions by authors who wish to speak to this audience, to offer advice, information and commiseration as needed. Future anticipated articles include the next installment from somewhere in North America by Jason Underwood. Also "A Day in the Life of..." by Dorit Zuk, Editor at Cell Press. Joanne Tornow will address how we can write a more effective NSF Grant. Surely her advice will be applicable to Postdoctoral Fellowships and independent PI grants! If you have advice, opinions or stories to share, send them in!

## Revamped RNA Society/Scaringe Award



In 2003, Stephen Scaringe, founder and former CEO and CSO of Dharmacon, generously agreed to sponsor along with the Society, the RNA Society/Scaringe Young Scientist Award. The award carries a substantial cash prize as well as full reimbursement for travel and registration at the Annual RNA meeting. Past winners were Stefano Marz (2004) and Ramesh Pillai (2005).

As originally conceived and implemented, the young scientist award was given to the junior author(s) of the "best" paper published in the RNA journal in the preceding calendar year as judged by the Depute Editors of RNA. This year, Stephen, Tim Nilsen and I, during the process of ongoing evaluation, felt that the scope of the award could be broadened while maintaining a close association with the RNA Journal. Accordingly, with the approval of the board of directors of the Society, the following changes to the Award will be implemented in 2006.

1. The award will be open to all junior scientists (graduate students or postdocs) who have made a significant contribution to the broad area of RNA research in the preceding year; i.e. the award will not be restricted to authors who have published in the RNA journal in that year.
2. The award will involve a formal nomination process. Any P.I. who is a member of the Society can nominate a junior scientist (in their lab or not) who they believe is worthy. Nominations will be in the form of a letter of one page or less summarizing the qualifications of the candidate. Students can also nominate themselves but they must submit a one page letter of support from a P.I. Upon nomination, the junior scientist will submit an NIH biosketch, reprint(s) of relevant papers, a one page summary of their research, and a one page outline of a potential review they would write in their area of research.
3. Following the application deadline (Dec. 31), the applications will be evaluated by the Awards Committee appointed by the Society. This committee will pick three finalists prior to the abstract deadline for the annual meeting. The finalists' names will appear in the abstract book and their expenses associated with attending the meeting will be reimbursed.

### RNA Society/Scaringe award FAQs

**Q. What do I win?**

**A.** Fame, a small fortune, a subscription for *RNA* and most importantly the opportunity to write a review for the society journal. In this regard, the winner by accepting the prize agrees to write a minireview (graduate student) or review (postdoc) in their area of expertise. The review can be written solely or in collaboration with their advisor.

**Q. Who should I contact if I have questions about his award?**

**A.** Please look for more information on the society website. You may also direct questions to the CEO, Evelyn Jabri or to the chief editor of *RNA*, Tim Nilsen.



## A day in the Life of...

### Joanne Tornow, Program Director, National Science Foundation



In my earlier life as an academic, I submitted my share of grant applications to Federal funding agencies such as NSF and NIH, some of which were funded and some of which were not. During those days, I often wondered about the mysterious people at the other end of the process who held the fate of my research in their hands—the Program Directors. Who were these people, and how did they get there? Years later, I am one of them, and now, no doubt, there are others out there wondering the same things about me.

So, who am I, and how did I get here? Like most of my fellow Program Directors here at the National Science Foundation, I am a Ph.D. scientist who came up through the academic ranks in the usual way. I received my Ph.D. from Yale University, did post-doctoral training at the University of California (Irvine and Santa Cruz), and then went on to a faculty position, first at Portland State University and then at the University of Southern Mississippi. I set up my lab, organized my teaching responsibilities, worked hard to get some research funding and settled happily in as an academic researcher. Over time, after teaching many semesters of Genetics and fielding many questions from students, I developed an interest in understanding how national policy based on scientific issues like genetic privacy would be determined. Also over the years, my interest grew in understanding how federal research funding priorities were set. Well, if one is interested in national policy questions, then spending some time in Washington DC is pretty much required, and so, after earning tenure and a sabbatical, I came to my own personal turning point.

In the fall of 1997, I moved to Washington for what was supposed to be one year, as a AAAS Science and Technology Policy Congressional Fellow, and worked in the U.S. Senate on the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee for Senator John D. Rockefeller IV. One year in Washington became two, the second of which was spent at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). What eye-opening experiences those were! Seeing firsthand how the federal budget process works in all of its gory detail, and learning just how many different stakeholders there are in developing science policy (some of whom haven't even developed a voice), gave me a new and deeper appreciation for thinking about science from a much broader perspective than is often possible as a researcher. As I was completing my term at OSTP, I had an opportunity to move to NSF as a Program Director in the Division of Molecular and Cellular Biosciences. This position offered the perfect balance between maintaining a close connection to the science that I love and providing opportunities to participate in science policy. At this point, I knew that I had mentally transitioned out of academia, and so made it official, resigning from my home institution and taking the Program Director position at NSF.

I have been at NSF for nearly six years now, and can honestly say that this is one of the most intellectually interesting and challenging experiences of my professional life. NSF is one of several agencies that provide federal research funding, but it has a special role in supporting fundamental research in all areas of science, engineering and education, and in fostering the development of the scientific workforce. As a Program Director, my primary responsibility is to manage a research portfolio covering all areas of gene expression, which involves handling proposals from the moment they are submitted to NSF until they are either declined or, if funded, until the award expires several years later. Much of my time is spent talking to PIs about their ideas and how to prepare a proposal for NSF, as well as how to prepare a revised proposal (an unfortunate reality is that most proposals are declined, one of the more difficult aspects of the job). Recruiting reviewers and panelists offers the opportunity to work with a wide range of interesting people from across the country. To be sure, there is plenty of paperwork, but most of it requires critical scientific thinking about important research questions, which offers opportunities to identify up-and-coming areas with potential for exciting outcomes. Program Directors develop a broad perspective on our areas of science, and so we often participate in other activities within NSF and across agencies that can influence policy development. There are many other aspects to this job that make it immensely satisfying that I don't have room to talk about, but you don't have to take my word for it. NSF has a robust "rotator" program, through which faculty can serve as Program Directors for a year or two. It's a great opportunity to broaden your horizons, and see how the agency works from the inside. Who knows, maybe we'll be working together soon!



## You can take the RNA nerd out of the lab, but you can't take the RNA out of the nerd. Jason Underwood



Welcome to the inaugural edition of the newsletter and hello to the great friends I have made through the RNA community. I was asked to write a column on mentoring, studentship, the transition from grad to postgrad, and the many issues that arise from that volatile combination. But, for now, I am happy to say that I have precious little of that on my mind. It has been 2 months since I defended my PhD and I am taking a welcome rest from those years of hard work. Circumstances in my personal life made this last six months especially difficult, and piled upon that, the final stretch of a doctoral degree can be trying, aggravating and other adjectives that cannot be used amongst these G-rated pages. To help me reset, I am taking some time off for recuperation. To those still in training, I cannot possibly recommend this option enough.

With our possessions in storage, another recent grad and I set off on a driving adventure that currently has us amidst the wonders of the big 49<sup>th</sup>, Alaska. We're loving (nearly) every moment of it. We have learned that everything is bigger in Alaska and that many of those things bite. As I write this, I am looking out on Kachemak Bay from the comfort of Homer. A bumper sticker here claims that Homer is "A quaint little drinking village with a fishing problem" but I think it is simply fantastic. If it wasn't for the short hours of sunlight during the long winter, I think I would just stay. I grew up in Montana and the mountains bring me an inner peace that is difficult to put into words. We have seen amazing sights, driven countless miles, sampled local brews and, most importantly, I have been able to do a great deal of contemplation. I'm still uncertain of my path now that my education is wrapped up, and it is nice to mingle amongst strangers who don't ask where I'm doing my postdoc.

Nevertheless, I do still think about science and even RNA in particular. I miss my labmates more than I ever imagined. I wonder what 3000 papers about RNAi have appeared in *Nature* and *Science* this last month. Peering through a windshield canvas splattered with insects, I think how cool it would be to wash off the glass with TRIzol and clone rRNA sequences from the medley to see what bugs we exterminated at 70 mph... true Norm Pace "search" style. I wonder why there isn't a dolphin genome project. They are so smart, disgustingly cute, and yet we know so little about any marine mammals on a molecular level. I risk rambling in my writing as much as I have in my travels, so I will close for now and hope that I have something more insightful to say when the column deadline looms again. Perhaps I'll have a postdoc, a new home, and a direction. At present, my situation suits me well.



## *eJobs with the RNA Society*



The RNA Society is pleased to provide an Employment and Careers webpage for the RNA community. Postings are free to members of the RNA Society. All advertisements are posted within two weeks of receipt and remain on this page for a three-month period. In addition, positions listed on this page are also published in our society newsletter as a free service and on a one-time basis.

- You may download the form as a Word document from the RNA society website (<http://www.rnasociety.org>).
- Please provide the requested information
- Name the completed form as LastName\_eJobs.doc (for example, Genius\_eJobs.doc)
- Return the saved file via email to [rna@faseb.org](mailto:rna@faseb.org).

**Type of position** (please click on one box to select category of job)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Postdoctoral Fellow Positions | <input type="checkbox"/> Government & Industry Positions                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Positions             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Positions ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____ |

**Description of position** (include area of research, skills required, start date and duration of position)

**Contact information** (*required*)

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

*The RNA Society has the right to reject job advertisements that they deem are inappropriate for posting on this site.*



# THE RNA SOCIETY

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