

President's Newsletter, April 2008

Dear Members:

First of all, allow me to begin by saying that it is a great honor to assume the SGI presidency, and I wish to thank all of you for electing me. For the first time in fifty-five years, the SGI has a President living outside North America: in particular, I am based in Siena small town located in Tuscany (Italy) Thus, I assume a heavy burden: to maintain such a great and prestigious organization as the SGI in good shape!!

At the Business Meeting in San Diego, last week, I outlined for this period 2008-2009 two major goals: **1.** to stimulate and support high quality research and young scientists, and **2.** to involve all SGI members in an "all-year Society".

One way to accomplish these goals will be this newsletter, which will be sent monthly to all of you. Each newsletter will begin with a story related to some aspect of "birth." The sources will include art, mythology, literature, and world religions.

This month we begin with the birth of Athena.



Amphor 550 b.c Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, USA

In the Greek Mythology, Zeus is the king of the gods. Though he was married to Hera, he often fell in love with other female creatures, both divine and mortal, one being Metis, the daughter of Oceanus and Tethys. In Greek, the word "mētis" means "wisdom," "knowledge," or "cunning," an ambiguous form of intellectual capacity that in any case received high consideration from the Greeks. [Mētis was the goddess of wisdom, though she was also equated with cunning and trickery.] According to tradition, Metis became pregnant with his child. Because an oracle had foretold to Zeus that "the newborn will be more powerful than you," he decided to devour Metis and the fetus. Oddly enough, the pregnancy (conceptus) was transferred to the body of the Zeus, though it developed in the head rather than the pelvis. According to the rules of the mythical code of discourse, such a displacement makes perfect sense: the goddess that embodied the "metis" (intelligence) would produce an "intellectual pregnancy." At the appropriate time, Prometheus cleaved the head of Zeus with an axe. Athena leaped from his skull, fully grown, wearing a helmet (made by her mother), and bearing armour. Named Minerva by the Romans, Athena is the goddess of justice, protector of arts and wisdom. She is the perfect goddess, the result of a combination of metis/intelligence and the brain of the greatest of the gods, Zeus.

There are two major reasons for beginning with this story:

- 1) Athena is the symbol of culture. It seems to me that the common background for all SGI Members is just that: a passion for the culture;
- 2) The brain as 'intellectual womb' for the birth represents the basis for the value of neuroendocrinology in reproduction!!

In 1977, Roger Guillemin, Rosalyn Yalow, and Andrew Schally received the Noble Price for their discovery of gonadotropin-releasing factors (GnRH): recognizing the brain (hypothalamus) as the control center of the ovulatory cycle and male gametogenesis. We must acknowledge that a great number of these discoveries occurred in San Diego, CA thanks to the close collaboration and friendship between scientists at the Salk Institute with Samuel Yen (Past President of the SGI in 1992, and recently deceased) and his fellows at the UCSD.

San Diego proved to be a great location for the 2008 Annual Meeting. Thanks to the excellent coordination of Hugh Taylor (Program Director) and Charlie Lockwood (SGI President, 2007-2008), we had a wonderful experience. The total attendance was 1093, which included 589 SGI members. The in-training members were 250 and the regular were 339. The abstract book contained 918 scientific contributions (oral and poster presentations), to which was added a series of great guest speakers. The two major lectures dedicated to steroid receptors by Jan-Ake Gustafsson (introduced by E.V. Jensen) and Bert O'Malley were of outstanding value, and offered the best evidence of the scientific merit of SGI. Among the invited speakers, a significant portion were young investigators from around the world. The Trainee Plenary Session and the CAB Industry Speaker Symposium were received with a great deal of interest.

President Charlie Lockwood distributed awards to the top twenty-five young investigators (thanks to Wyeth) (see the list on the web site). He also gave awards to Linda Giudice (The President's Distinguished Scientist Award), to Hugh Taylor (The President's Achievement Award) and to James Roberts (The Frederick Naftolin Award for Mentorship). The first Rogerio Lobo Award was given to Michael Ross for his paper published in Reproductive Sciences in 2007.

For the first time, the Program Directors (John Challis and Sarah Berga) were able to bring to the Annual Congress a printed version of the Preliminary Scientific Program of the 2009 Annual Meeting. As you are all aware, it will be held in Glasgow, Scotland, UK. For the first time after 56 years the annual scientific meeting will be held outside of North America. Glasgow is one of Europe's most exciting, safe and beautiful destinations. Reasonable airfare can be found from all over the world. Dr. Challis and Dr. Berga have already done a great job selecting 43 speakers and moderators divided among: three major plenary lecturers, seven meet the experts, five debates, and 13 minisymposia. The list will be published soon on the SGI web site: <http://sgionline.org>. The next detailed version of the Scientific Program will be ready in September 2008. The Council welcomed Robert Taylor as the new President Nominee, and Sandra Davidge and Kelle Moley as new Council Members. Nostaran Foyouzi will represent the in-training members at the Annual Council Meeting. Michael Ross began his three-year term as Secretary Treasurer.

The chairs of the following Standing Committees were confirmed and/or nominated:

- 1) The Bylaws Committee: Murray Mitchell
- 2) The Nomination Committee: Carole Mendelson
- 3) The Membership Committee: Nicholas Illsley
- 4) The Program Committee: Steve Lye
- 5) The Publication Committee: Phyllis Leppert
- 6) The Government Affairs Committee: James Rose

The Site Selection and the Finance Committees are automatically renewed.

Three new ad hoc Committees have been proposed and accepted:

- 1) The Development Plan Committee (John Challis, Linda Giudice, Charles Lockwood, Leslie Myatt, Robert Taylor, Michael Ross)
- 2) The Communication Committee (Kirk Conrad, Sandra Davidge, Dino Giussani, Jane Norman, Laura Goldsmith, Alberto Imperatore)
- 3) The Education Committee (Hugh Taylor, Kelle Moley, David Olson, Carlos Simon, Wolfgang Holzegreave, Nick Macklon)

Contributions and suggestions are welcome from all of you. Please consider giving **5 minutes each day to the SGI!!**

Sincerely,



Felice Petraglia
SGI President, 2008-2009