

250 New England Chemical Engineers & Students Network at Guppy Night

Guppies and schools of fish swim with a shark, mackerel, haddock, and tortoise, while a benevolent kingfish encourages interaction among them all. No, this isn't the New England Aquarium or the latest animated movie to hit the box office. This is Guppy Night, hosted by the Boston Section of the AIChE, or as they prefer to be called, "The Ichthyologists of Boston."

Guppy Night, held on Oct. 1, brought together approximately 150 chemical engineering students from 12 New England universities and 100 chemical engineering professionals. Targeted networking, student awards, participation in a panel discussion titled, "Chemical Engineering as a Launch Platform for Diverse Careers," and dinner rounded out the evening's activities.

Meeting with the big fish

"Networking is a skill that everyone, especially chemical engineers, should learn and use to achieve career success," said Rob Reintjes, Ichthyologist "Kingfish" (Boston Section chair). Andy Irwin, Ichthyologist "Mackerel" (Boston Section vice chair and interim program chair) encouraged group networking before dinner. With designated areas for students from each university, the alumni were directed to connect with students from their own alma mater.

Chemical engineering students from the following universities attended the meeting: Brown University; University of Connecticut; Yale University; University of Rhode Island; Worcester Polytechnic Institute; University of Massachusetts at Amherst; University of Massachusetts at Lowell; Northeastern University; Tufts University; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; University of New Hampshire; and the University of Maine.

During dinner, assigned seating mixed up the crowd so professionals and students from different schools were interspersed. Reintjes circulated among the tables coaching the professionals and the students on ways to seek common ground during conversation.

Recommended topics gave the participants a chance to talk about themselves. Professionals outlined personal career paths, while students discussed activities outside university studies. This facilitated-networking technique made it easier for professionals and students to connect and revealed common interests among the participants.

Swimming into new territories

The "Diverse Careers" panel, comprised of two entrepreneurs, an attorney, a process development manager and a business manager, shared how panelists'

opportunities that are not widely known."

"The meeting was superb," said Christos Georgakis, professor and chair, Dept. of Chemical and Biological Engineering and director, Systems Research Institute for Chemical and Biological Processes, Tufts University. "The Boston Section assembled a very qualified, diverse and enthusiastic group of speakers that attracted a record number of attendees, both students and professionals. While my department had 16 undergraduate student participants, the second largest school participation, I feel sorry that not all of our undergraduates

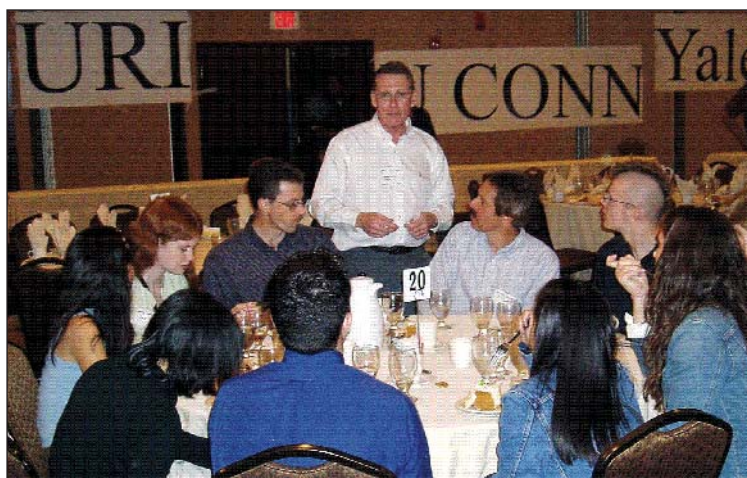
were not there as the information that the meeting provided for their career choices was so informative and helpful."

Irwin noted, "most importantly, those attending may have met their future employer or the person who will recommend them to a friend in the course of finding that dream job, or they might have just made some new friends. That is how we

measure our success."

Reintjes added, "Social networking as a basis for creating strong business connections is something the 14 founding fathers, including Arthur D. Little, recognized back in 1931 when the Ichthyologists were founded. Our section has had a rich heritage that has been building for over 70 years, but in recent years, meeting attendance had fallen off. We are now in the process of revitalizing the Ichthyologists. Last season, for example, we more than doubled the monthly meeting attendance. This year, we are in the process of tripling member volunteer participation, while increasing the level of networking available for our members."

Next month, in the Dec. issue of *Extra*, The Ichthyologists will share with other local sections the methods they found effective in doubling meeting attendance, as well as their plans to triple member volunteer participation.



chemical engineering degrees helped prepare them for a wide variety of exciting careers. (See www.aiche-boston.org for bios of panel members, as well as a brief history of the Ichthyologists and a listing of the "Offishers" who worked as a team to make this meeting a success).

The Local Section's focus on connecting people continued even after the meeting. Business cards collected at the meeting were scanned into a database and later emailed to all attendees. This allowed people to leverage the networking connections they made by reaching out to more attendees at a later time.

AIChE Local Sections Committee Vice Chair Steve Horstkamp, who attended the meeting, said "The students and professionals are excited about this meeting format. There are numerous opportunities outside traditional chemical engineering roles that students may not yet know about. This meeting provides the students formal and informal presentations about career