

For Openers

Good News, Bad Numbers



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Having been around the business world for a few decades, I've seen a number of corporate annual reports. The first half of a typical report presents statements from the CEO on the current state of the business. There is often a recitation of products introduced, notable achievements, a list of the directors, and so on. Then comes the other half, where the financial numbers are laid out, summed, dissected, and variously commented upon. I bring this up because the 2002 Annual Report of the American Chemical Society was recently made publicly available.* Although ACS is not a corporation like Microsoft or General Motors, it is an organization that represents the interests of its member chemists in a way that is analogous to the way public corporations represent (or should represent) the financial interests of their stockholders.

The mission of ACS is "to encourage in the broadest and most liberal manner the advancement of the chemical enterprise and its practitioners", and according to the 2002 annual report, 161,144 of those practitioners are members of the Society. Eight of them are profiled in some detail. One is Dr. Ray Crist, who at the age of 103, continues to work in his laboratory. He's been a member of ACS for 77 years, and continues to publish in ACS journals, most recently in the March 2002 *Environmental Science & Technology*. We should all hope to be that productive for that length of time.

From this same report, it is clear that the accomplishments of the Society are varied and many. The ACS Chemical Abstracts Service's SciFinder Scholar chemical and scientific information system has a 300% growth rate at academic institutions. The chemistry text for nonscience college majors, *Chemistry in Context*, a project of the ACS Education Division, is now in its fourth edition and is the leading course book of its kind. The ACS divisions presented more than 13,000 papers at the two national meetings, and Career Services assisted job seekers in scheduling more than 2000 interviews at one national meeting alone. The ACS Petroleum Research Fund gave out over 500 research grants that totaled over \$25 million, a 40% increase from the previous year. In the ACS Publications Division, we launched the *Journal of Proteome Research*, and the TCAW staff produced the first in our Chronicles of Chemistry series, a *Luminaries of the Chemical Sciences* special supplement. The second in this series is planned for next August.

Then comes the financial part of the annual report, a picture unfortunately not quite as positive as that of ACS's accomplishments. "The Society has been buffeted by the turmoil of the current financial climate, and the strength of our financial position has been eroded." That statement could apply to all of us in chemistry, as Mary Jordan and Janel Kasper-Wolfe of the Career Services Department demonstrate in their article, "Another Good Year/Bad Year" (p 33). Those of us still employed in our chosen profession are doing well, but there are 3.5% of us who are not employed, a record for Society members.

The past two years have been economically difficult for everyone, and chemists are not excluded. But this shall not stand. We are no more witnessing the decline of chemistry than we are witnessing the decline of science. No doubt about it, for many this is a bad patch to go through. But I cannot help but believe that chemistry will continue to be a science and a career of merit. ♦

* The 2002 and earlier Annual Reports of the American Chemical Society are available at chemistry.org.