



Dr. Cindi Smith-Walters

Greetings TAS members and *Journal* readers,

In this journal the new TAS president annually provides the membership with a biographical sketch. This year, however, I feel it more important to focus my comments on the academy and what it has to offer to you as a professional. With that in mind only the beginning of this letter will sketch my background; I will end with what you can do to enrich both the Academy and your professional life.

For the past 15 years I have been a professor of biology at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). That role is probably very similar to the professional roles of a majority of our membership. Unlike most members, I additionally co-direct the MTSU Center for Environmental Education (CEE). The Center is a branch of the department of biology and runs entirely on the 'soft money' provided by numerous grants and contracts. CEE educational efforts range from a series of public service TV and radio advertisements on water quality, a "Tools of Science" loan program to schools, conservation ecology staff development programs for pre- and in-service educators, school assembly programs, video-conferences on wildlife and resource management, curriculum/multi-media development on exotic species, to providing a home for the statewide Tennessee Amphibian Monitoring Program. If you

are interested in an autobiographical account of my activities, awards, and efforts, simply go to the MTSU CEE website—[http://www.mtsu.edu/~mtsucee/Center\\_Staff.htm](http://www.mtsu.edu/~mtsucee/Center_Staff.htm)—and access that information.

The Tennessee Academy of Science has a long history of promoting not only the accomplishment of scientific research but also the dissemination of scientific knowledge. TAS provides a forum for communication between those of us engaged in scientific work, as well as a venue to recognize excellence in both research and education at the pre-college, collegiate, and professional levels. These efforts are fostered in a number of ways.

1) *The JOURNAL of the TENNESSEE ACADEMY of SCIENCE*

The *Journal*, published either quarterly or semiannually depending on submissions, provides a way to share the work of our members with a wide audience. Published since 1912 and peer-reviewed, it provides a vital medium to disseminate the work of researchers in Tennessee. It is an important publication of the Academy and can only continue through the efforts of the membership, both by submitting manuscripts and by reviewing the manuscripts of others. You may become a more active member by contacting our new editor, Dr. Stephen Stedman, and submitting your own manuscripts or serving as a reviewer.

2) PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS FOR THE MEMBERSHIP

The Academy sponsors a number of meetings statewide. Our last Annual meeting was held at Volunteer State Community College and featured a morning symposium given by Dr. Linda Slakey, the National Science Foundation's Director of Undergraduate Education, and a plenary session presented by Mr. Kent Syler, Chief of Staff for U.S. Representative Bart Gordon. The afternoon offered 11 different technical sessions, some of which were split between rooms because there were so many submissions. Dr. J. Michael Redding consistently provides excellent coordination of each meetings and this year's local arrangements chair, Ms. Nancy Morris, developed a program that was widely attended by both members and student researchers. If you have not recently attended an annual meeting, please consider attendance this coming November. It will be held in Nashville and will be a joint meeting with the Tennessee Science Teachers Association. This meeting promises to be another excellent conference.

Additionally, under the able direction of Dr. Fred Matthews, the Academy sponsors a yearly Collegiate Division Meeting in each grand division of the State. These meetings, designed to support and to foster the next generation of researchers and educators, are increasingly well attended. The Collegiate Division Meeting is another way in which you and your students can become more involved in TAS.

### 3) THE TENNESSEE JUNIOR ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

Through the outstanding leadership of Dr. Jack Rhoton, the Tennessee Junior Academy of Science has flourished during the past 15+ years. TJAS has been in existence since 1942 and is one of the longest running programs for the Academy. This annual program could easily be compared to scientific meetings of adult scientists and is designed to further the cause of science education in Tennessee high schools by fostering a scientific atmosphere where high school age students can share their own research and knowledge. In short, the Junior Academy promotes and encourages improved science instruction in Tennessee and promotes original scientific research by secondary students.

Of all the TJAS submissions each year only 30 are invited to present to peers at the annual TJAS meeting. The top seven papers are subsequently published in the *Handbook and Proceedings of the Tennessee Junior Academy of Science*. The authors of the top papers are honored with monetary awards and student winners have the opportunity to participate in the American Junior Academy of Science, which meets annually with the National Academy of Science. The *Handbook and Proceedings* are also sent to all public and private schools in Tennessee each year. Contents include abstracts of past winning manuscripts, guidelines for paper development and submission, information about the annual meeting, instructions to apply for TJAS student research grants, and more.

### 4) THE VISITING SCIENTIST PROGRAM

In the past year Dr. Michael Daley has worked with the Education Committee to revive the Tennessee Visiting Scientist Program (VSP). VSP allows members to interact with Tennessee's PreK-12 student population by sending senior scientists into classrooms statewide. PreK-12 teachers request speakers and participating TAS members personally visit and/or electronically communicate with students. Classroom visits generally last 30-60 minutes and include demonstrations, lectures, and/or hands-on activities. Currently, only a few Academy members volunteer their time and expertise to school classrooms. If you also feel that personal communication is an important part of a child's science education, you should check the appropriate section on the membership form next time you renew and/or contact Dr. Daley about volunteering to visit schools in your area as a representative of TAS.

### 5) SCIENCE FAIRS

TAS and its members support both local and regional science fairs. Regional fairs are held annually in Memphis, Jackson, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Johnson City. The Academy provides judges upon request and at the regional level winners receive certificates and/or monetary awards. In addition, TAS members commonly mentor high school

students in science and mathematics research efforts. Again, if you feel that this is one way you can contribute to furthering of quality of science education in the State, check the appropriate section on the membership form next time you renew.

### 6) AWARDS

A vigorous awards program to recognize individuals for distinction in their fields is a last way TAS supports outstanding science research and education. Awards given include the Distinguished College/University Scientist Award, the Distinguished Industrial Scientist, the Distinguished College/University Teacher Award, and the Distinguished Secondary School Science Teacher Award. This last is awarded to deserving science educators at the pre-college level. The promotion and fostering of excellence in the sciences continues to be important to our organization.

### 7) TAS WEBSITE

In 1996 TAS President Dr. David Kesler voiced his goal to establish a TAS home page. Consequently our website was born and was originally hosted by the University of Tennessee at Martin. It currently is found at MTSU and the webmaster is chemistry professor Dr. Jim Howard. For several years he has volunteered time and talent to the site. I hope that in this next year I can work closely with him to make the site even more user friendly. This site is 'our face to the world' and a vital communication tool. Please visit the site-<http://www.mtsu.edu/tnacadsc/> and provide your comments so that we can continue to improve upon what we already have in place for members and visitors.

These are only the most visible ways TAS supports science research and education. With this in mind I must say that today is a great moment of challenge and change for education at all levels in Tennessee. It is also a moment of great promise for the Academy with the prospect of substantial room to grow, both in membership and in impact. Society depends more than ever before on the capacity of universities to generate new knowledge and to prepare individuals to lead lives of value. TAS provides a forum that brings together faculty, researchers, and students from both the high school and college audiences whose talent and energy drive an academic agenda of remarkable scope. I strongly urge each member to support the on-going activities of TAS. This organization does not run itself. Your participation is the key.

I am honored to serve as your President in 2008 and look forward to working with fellow officers, members of the Committees, and all TAS members in promoting the goals of the Academy. Please share your thoughts, ideas, and interests regarding the Tennessee Academy of Science with members of the Executive Committee. We are listening. Thank you.