

## **Forensic Science: Envisioning and Creating the Future**

It is only befitting that for once a forensic scientist can put a lawyer in chains... But all of you who know me know I will not be restrained!

It is an honor and a privilege to be elected the President of AAFS. I attended my first meeting in 1983 – 25 years ago! At that time I was told by Jim Starrs, my professor at George Washington University that I would really enjoy working in this organization and learn a great deal – That was an understatement!

There is no ignoring the impact of forensic science today. New developments in science and technology are advancing at a rapid pace. New areas include digital and multimedia sciences, canine scent detection and touch DNA, to name a few. Forensic science also is not local, but global, as evidenced by our international visitors from 63 countries. It is also, as Senator Biden said this morning in his video address, “absolutely indispensable work.” Science provides hope and ensures justice as was demonstrated by the engaging interdisciplinary session we had at this meeting yesterday- “Incarcerations and Exonerations: the Key Role of the Forensic Sciences.” Scientists, law enforcement, and lawyers need to keep abreast of the scientific advances as well as the changes in the rules affecting the introduction of such evidence in court. There has also been much discussion of juror expectations regarding scientific evidence (the so-called “CSI Effect”). The forensic scientist who turns a blind eye to these advances and expectations does so at his or her own peril.

This is a time of great challenges for forensic science. We cannot ignore the impact of events that will occur in 2008 – the National Academy of Sciences Report and significant changes in legislation, to name a few.

The positive interest in forensic science by the general public is offset by the skepticism of some communities about the competency of practitioners and the reliability of the evidence arising from their work.

These opposing perspectives create unique challenges to all of us because we are committed to the profession of forensic science: we do not wish to be appreciated on the basis of our CSI entertainment value nor do we wish to be regarded as lacking competence and objectivity. My response to these opposing perspectives is that we need to promote our vision for forensic science: a future in which the forensic sciences are seen by everyone as representing the highest standards of practice and scientific evidence is seen as a solid foundation for assuring public safety and justice. Some would ask how we can predict the future? The late Peter Drucker said that the best way to predict the future is to create it. Under Bruce’s presidency we have stated our mission. During my presidency I want us to create our vision of the future of forensic sciences. The theme for the 2009 meeting is Forensic Science: Envisioning and Creating the Future

I am confident we can shape the future of forensic science and this is how: I see three areas where we can create our future: Communication, Education and Collaboration.

**Communication:** I am old enough to remember mimeograph machines, typewriters and the brick phone. There have been incredible leaps in technology that facilitate communication. We need to utilize this technology that resonates with those we want to

reach – the future forensic scientists – the “digital natives” as Howard Gardner, the author of *Five Minds for the Future* calls them - so we need to use podcasts, vodcasts, distance ed, u-tube. I envision developing podcast primers on each area of forensic science/sort of mini tutorials. Also since the past is prologue I think we need to record oral histories of many of our members – who possess incredible knowledge so we can pass it on to our future generations.

**Education:** We have many audiences to educate – our members, students, law enforcement, legal practitioners, judges and the general public. We can use the new technology I previously discussed. We also need to look at increasing resources for the AAFS educational efforts like the Forensic Science Educators Conferences and for the Forensic Science Foundation Acorn and Lucas grants to encourage forensic science scholarship.

**Collaboration:** We are a unique multidisciplinary organization; we bring together diverse groups and opinions. We can do even more outreach. We will expand our international collaborations and should continue our great relationship with national associations such as the Council of Scientific Society Presidents, 60 societies that represent more than 1.4 million scientists and educators, and create relationships with the ABA Science and Technology Law Section, AAAS, IACP and other professional associations.

This is an exciting and challenging time to be a part of the forensic science profession. I deeply care about the issues we face and I am committed to work diligently and creatively to further the mission of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. We cannot shrink from our challenges nor shirk our responsibilities to the justice system. I love this organization and all of you, my colleagues and friends, to the base pairs of my DNA and the membranes of my mitochondria. I know we can be even more of a powerhouse of an organization and I consider it an honor and a privilege to lead us into the future. For those of you staying in the Marriott have you noticed the note pads by the phones? On it is the statement “Leave a trail of genius.” Isn’t that what all of us as professionals want to do? We want to do the right thing, be respected, and assist in ensuring justice is done. Let us begin to blaze our trail of genius