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## All Aboard the Innovation Train!

*Chemical & Engineering News* - December 17, 2007

By Catherine T. Hunt

President, American Chemical Society

**AS THE YEAR** draws to a close, I find myself able to spend more time with my family—a blessing of being almost past-president! Very recently, I took time to enjoy a children's story, "The Polar Express," and was particularly struck by a line from the story, "One thing about trains ... the important thing is deciding to get on."

I am more convinced than ever that the innovation train is leaving the station and that now is the time for us, as scientists, to get on board. To this end, I have been talking with just about anyone and everyone who will listen—from cab drivers to chief executive officers, from flight attendants to fellow travelers, from local papers to major dailies like the New York Times and the Washington Post, and from government agencies to congressional offices to the White House. I've been talking about innovation and competitiveness and their foundation in chemistry.

We were positively thrilled by a little first-grader who levitated out of her chair with joy, hopping, clapping, and almost singing, "It's time for chemistry!" And to my delight, I have found that not only are others also singing the innovation song, but most important, people are listening. ACS, along with its partners in the Task Force on the Future of American Innovation, have been contacting the major presidential candidates to find out if they have innovation agendas, and the feedback received to date has been encouraging.

This has been an unforgettable year with so many emotions. Here are but a few examples. It has been...

**Exhilarating** to visit the chemistry department at Rochester Institute of Technology and its National Technical Institute for the Deaf with Todd Pagano. Every student's eyes were on me and the woman next to me, who was signing my every word. I have never felt so wholly and completely listened to in my entire life. Oh, if only every student were so attentive!

**Reassuring** to start the day at breakfast with the Rochester Section chair, D. Richard

Cobb, and Kodak management discussing public outreach, career development, and what ACS can do for them.

**Uplifting** to open their Technician's Symposium with my ACS talk on education, collaboration, and innovation and to sense their genuine interest and engagement. And, yes, exhilarating to finish with a local section meeting celebrating the involvement and accomplishments of their volunteers.

**Enlightening** to spend two days in Delaware focused on science, technology, engineering, and math education hosted by Martha Holloman and her local section colleagues. We visited with the Delaware secretary of education and K-12 teachers, addressed both houses of the state legislature, talked with both the governor and the lieutenant governor, and visited five science classes in four different schools. ([View a video clip](#)).

And tired as we were in our final class of the day, we were positively thrilled by a little first-grader who levitated out of her chair with joy, hopping, clapping, and almost singing, "It's time for chemistry!" A kind glance from the teacher and she slipped quickly back into her chair to prepare her experiment tray. Oh, if only every teacher were so talented and every child so engaged!

Thrilling to have my eyes opened by the chemistry demonstrations of hip, award-winning high schoolers and our own celebrated student affiliates. Oh, if only every student could be a student affiliate!

Amazing to visit Mary L. Good in Little Rock, Ark., and experience "Girls of Promise," a special science mentoring program for eighth graders. And reassuring to visit John Villarreal in Edinburg, Texas, for Hispanic Science, Technology & Engineering Week—which reaches more than 85,000 people—and talk about careers in science and technology and be so well-received.

Uplifting to visit Terre Haute, Ind., for the National Historic Chemical Landmark for Rumford Baking Powder at Clabber Girl headquarters with Paul Jones and be greeted by local news media and politicians alike.

Over the past year, I have not only crisscrossed the U.S., but I have also had many opportunities to interact with my counterparts from around the world. After talking with presidents from more than 50 scientific societies across Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Asia, I am more convinced than ever that the innovation train is leaving the station, not only here in the U.S., but globally. If we want to stay competitive on a global basis, we had better get on board!

If you are ready to get on board, visit [the ACS Web site](#) and join the activity of your choice—from student affiliates going green to the Silver Circle mentoring students, from joining the Legislative Action Network to supporting Project SEED, from celebrating National Chemistry Week to enrolling in leadership training. There is something for everyone—from sustainability of energy, food, and water to biotechnology for health and

wellness, from nanotechnology to biotechnology and beyond at this [Web site](#).

Whatever you do, don't be left in the station. Thank you for the privilege of serving as your ACS president. This is a year I will cherish forever!

Keep those cards and letters coming.

**Rochester Institute of Technology**

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