

► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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I Stand on the Shoulders of Giants

I am humbled and honored to serve as your president. The presidents who served before—from Herbert A. Jewett to CDR Anna Khan—have all prepared a way for me and guided our organization from its beginnings in 1937 to today.

We have seen numerous practice changes as we have adopted hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) processes and accepted model codes for food safety, swimming pools, and body art. We played a vital role in the elimination of smallpox and rejoiced in 1978 when smallpox was declared eradicated. Past-President Vince Radke was part of that program. We also faced and are dealing with new diseases such as West Nile virus, the spread of numerous tickborne illnesses, and the emergence of new vectors in places they were not seen before due to changing weather patterns. A transition from paper to electronic reporting, increased data sharing, and the list goes on. We as a profession have always responded to the changes and have embraced them.

I was born in Trinidad in the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago, an area that gifted the world with steel drums. I attended Presentation College San Fernando in Trinidad where I developed a love for biology. After leaving high school, I was offered a job interview at a bank, but working indoors and wearing a tie was not something that appealed to me. I applied for a job in a municipal *Aedes aegypti* control program as a field technician, going to people's homes locating mosquito foci and treating them. The job was fun and I enjoyed what I did—going to a new environment each day, getting to know my town, meeting new people, and exploring a variety of living condi-

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tions. I immediately knew this was the space I wanted to be in for the rest of my working life.

While vacationing in Barbados, I saw a notice in the newspaper inviting applications to the public health inspection program at Barbados Community College and was encouraged by my Barbadian hosts, Lorna and Christopher Edwards, to apply to the program. As an indecisive young adult, it took me 3 years to decide to apply and once I stepped on the path, there was no looking back.

Hinkitch Irvin Bell, the program coordinator and a retired chief public health inspector, took me under his wings and guided me through the program. It was here that I truly understood the breadth and depth of the environmental health practice, although at that time the term environmental health was just being introduced to describe our profession. Bell was not only a mentor but also an inspiration. He was one of the first in Barbados to earn the Public Health Certificate from the Royal Society of Public Health and to become the first Fellow of the Royal Society of Health in Barbados. He also taught public health inspection classes at his home so that

a future generation of public health and environmental health practitioners could acquire the skill and certification needed to do their jobs. That is the foundation for my belief that information is useless unless it is shared.

Bell inspired us daily with a quotation from Dale Carnegie's book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*. One quote has stuck with me and has guided my approach to practice and life: "I shall pass this way but once; any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer nor neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

I was first introduced to the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) and the *Journal of Environmental Health* through the stacks that were in the classroom. The environmental health practice in the Caribbean was different from what I encountered in the U.S., where there is significant specialization and duties distributed among several agencies. The environmental public health practitioner in the Caribbean is expected to have a wide knowledge, and their duties include environmental sanitation (duties normally conducted by the Department of Public Works), water quality monitoring, mosquito control programs, emergency preparedness and response, meat and food inspection, milk sanitation and hygiene, healthy housing, and onsite wastewater, to name just a few.

I migrated to the U.S. and became a member of NEHA. I have earned several credentials from NEHA: the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS), the Certified Professional—Food Safety (CP-FS), and the Healthy Housing

Specialist (HHS). I am also a Certified Health Officer (CHO) in Massachusetts. Further, I hold a master of public health and a master of arts in public administration.

I was invited to join the board of the Massachusetts Environmental Health Association (MEHA) and became its president. As its education chair, I refocused our quarterly meetings to focus on practice-ready offerings, sharing information that environmental public health practitioners can implement in practice immediately.

While attending the NEHA 2015 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in Orlando, Florida, I witnessed Dr. David Dyjack, our new executive director, address the association for the first time. I knew that the regional vice-president (RVP) of Region 9 was stepping down, and I wanted to be part of Dr. Dyjack's new vision for NEHA. I discussed the vacancy with Patrick Maloney, a past Region 9 RVP and my friend and mentor, who encouraged me to run and guided my candidacy. I was elected to the board in 2016. I committed to serving two terms as Region 9 RVP, and then I ran

for national office in 2022 and was elected as second vice-president.

I was instrumental in getting the online Community site set up. I look forward to further engagement with our members. I want to look at new and emerging environmental health challenges and to turn our focus away from regulation to a more scientific approach to what we do. We need to pursue enhanced marketing programs that inform our communities and bring greater recognition to the practice of environmental public health. I look forward to further engagement with all our partners, which will create a space for early practitioners to learn from or connect with seasoned practitioners to get advice or be mentored by them.

NEHA is made up of not only the board of directors and its executive director, staff, and technical advisors but also its membership. There are many opportunities available to support and participate in the advancement of your profession. Please avail yourself of those opportunities. We as a profession are doers, not talkers. We solve problems and move on to the next one. We do not spend

enough time claiming what we have done, nor do we get the recognition for our work, which could be the reason for us being a hidden profession. So, let us all work together to claim our space and gain the recognition we deserve. If you have an idea, please feel free to reach out to me.

As I close this column, I leave you with the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow taken from his poem, *The Ladder of St. Augustine*. These words are an apt description of our profession and our association: "The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night."

I would like to thank every environmental health professional for all you do daily, not for recognition but for the satisfaction that we are keeping our communities safe.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve as your president. ✨


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