



SUMMER 2015

The SS-ASPB

Newsletter of the Southern Section of the American Society of Plant Biologists



*Greetings from
Dr. Rick Turley
2015-2016
Chair of the SS-ASPB*

Hello my Southern Section friends! As I reflect back on this incredible year, we have had an amazing meeting at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama, with great food, excellent presentations by both undergraduates and graduate students, three excellent speakers at the Kriton Hatzios Symposium, Dr. Meg Staton, Dr. Joshua Udall and Dr. Will Sanders all wrapped up in a beautiful island setting. Many thanks go to our past Secretary/Treasurer Dr. Ken Korth for organizing this wonderful event in conjunction with the two on-site coordinators Dr. Kelly Major and Dr. Tim Sherman, both from the University of South Alabama. After serving under two excellent Chairs, Dr. Jay Shockey and Dr. Ashlee McCaskill, I am still amazed with this organization and how each meeting progresses into a “masterpiece”. Our next meeting is moving into the “masterpiece” category and will be in Denton, Texas, on the weekend/Monday of April 2nd to April 4th, 2016. For those who haven’t attended, our last three meetings have ranged from 116 to 157 attendees with plenty of opportunities to give poster and oral presentations for both undergraduates and graduate students. These meetings are great opportunities to establish scientific collaborations, renew friendships and just have a good time. I hope to see you there.

In This Issue

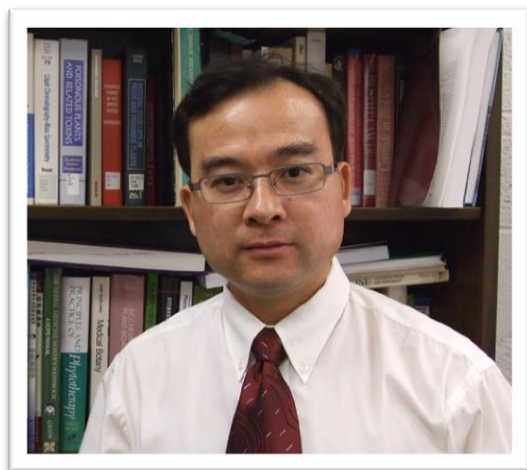
Letter from the Chair....	1
2015-2016 SS-ASPB Elections.....	2
Plantae.org.....	4
Plant Biology 2015.....	5
Better Know a Member.....	6
SS-ASPB 2016.....	7
Officer Listing.....	8

SS-ASPB 2016-2017 Elections

It's time to elect the SS-ASPB officers for the 2016-2017 term. This year, the 2014-2015 Chair Dr. Ashlee McCaskill will step onto the Executive Committee, while Dr. Rebecca Dickstein will rotate off. The nominations committee (Drs. Paul Stephenson, Jay Shockey, Ashlee McCaskill, Rick Turley and Ken Korth) is putting forward Dr. Deyu Xie, Dr. Aruna Kilaru and Dr. Shahid Mukhtar for the position of Secretary/Treasurer. Biographical sketches for Secretary/Treasurer candidates are below. Additionally, Dr. Rick Turley will run for Executive Committee, Dr. Ken Korth will run for Chair and Dr. Nihal Dharmasiri will run for Vice Chair in the upcoming election by the membership. Members will receive access to voting via email. The results will be announced in the fall newsletter.



2016-2017 Secretary/Treasurer Candidate Biographies



Dr. Deyu Xie is an Associate Professor in the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC. He received his doctoral degree in Plant Physiology in 1997 at the Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China. His research interests center on molecular biology and metabolic engineering of plant natural products and pathways in food, medicinal and bioenergy crops. He has published approximately fifty articles in his research areas, including top journals such as *Science*, *Cell*, *Plant Cell* and *Plant Physiology*. He has given nearly fifty talks in conferences and institutions. Dr. Xie serves as an associate editor for *Planta* and *Advances in Biological Chemistry* journals. He serves as one of the advisory council members and on the future meeting committees of the Phytochemical Society of North America. He also serves one of advisors of the North

Carolina Herbal Association and provides multiple professional services to other professional societies and institutions. He was the guest editor for the special issue entitled "Metabolic Plant Biology" for *Planta*. He organized the 53rd annual meeting of the Phytochemical Society of North America in 2014. He succeeded in raising more than \$30,000 to invite 23 speakers and to provide free food and banquet to achieve a productive annual meeting. In addition, Dr. Xie was the recipient of the DIAO Distinguished Research Award, Chinese Academy of Sciences, in 1997, and the recipient of the Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award, Phytochemistry Society of North America, in 2009. Dr. Xie was awarded the "Thank A Teacher" honor by North Carolina State University "Thank A Teacher" program in 2012 and 2014 because his teaching has made differences in undergraduate students' lives. Dr. Xie is honored to be nominated to run for Secretary/Treasurer of SS-ASPB for 2016-2017. He is enthusiastic to serve his best to grow SS-ASPB.

Dr. Aruna Kilaru is an Assistant Professor of Biology at East Tennessee State University since 2011. She received her B.Sc. degree in Botany, Zoology and Chemistry from Andhra University, and M.Sc. in Biotechnology from Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, in India. Aruna earned her Ph.D. degree in Environmental and Evolutionary Biology in 2005, from University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL), under the guidance of Dr. Karl Hasenstein. Her doctoral research was focused on understanding host-pathogen interactions between *Theobroma cacao* (The Chocolate Tree) and a basidiomycete, *Moniliophthora perniciosa*. Her subsequent postdoctoral work with Prof. Kent Chapman at the University of North Texas (2005-09) involved deciphering fatty acid ethanolamide-mediated lipid signaling in plants. At Michigan State University (2009-11), she worked with Prof. John Ohlroge, to identify biochemical regulators for carbon partitioning in seed and nonseed tissues.



Dr. Kilaru currently maintains a diverse research group and a host of national and international collaborations. Her current work is primarily focused on understanding the role of small lipid molecules in mediating abiotic stress responses, using moss as a model system, which recently attracted funding from NSF. Her team also works on regulation of storage oil biosynthesis in nonseed tissues, such as mesocarp of avocado. Aruna's work led to more than 25 publications in high-impact journals and was recognized with numerous honors and awards including Sigma Xi Grants-in-Aid of Research Award (2001, 2005), The Arthur Neish Young Investigator Award from Phytochemical Society for N America (2011), New Faculty Award from College of Arts and Sciences, East Tennessee State University (2014) and Women's Young Investigator Travel Award from American Society for Plant Biologists (2015). Dr. Kilaru has been an active member of ASPB, including southern section since 2001.



Dr. Shahid Mukhtar has fifteen years of training and experience in plant biology, specializing in genetics, genomics, transcriptomics, and network science as well as in handling large datasets and employing computational tools to answer key questions in plant systems biology.

Dr. Mukhtar obtained his Ph.D. in 2005 working with Dr. Imre Somssich (Max-Planck Institute, Cologne, Germany) on Arabidopsis transcriptional regulatory networks. From 2006-2010 he continued his post-doctoral research in the laboratory of Dr. Jeff Dangl, a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator and a member of the National Academy of Sciences, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Mukhtar employed genomics, bioinformatics and computer-aided systems-level analyses to generate the first large-scale Arabidopsis-pathogens protein-protein interaction network in collaboration with the Dana Farber Cancer Institute & Center for Cancer Systems Biology, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School in Boston, MA.

Dr. Mukhtar is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His research focuses at the interface of bioinformatics and life sciences. He is broadly interested in interdisciplinary research projects focused on genomics/systems biology of plant immunity using computational approaches. He aims to understand how macromolecular networks are organized in the cells and how phytopathogenic proteins perturb the flow of biological information to promote diseases. Specifically, he is pursuing research in plant-microbe interactions on the following three avenues: 1) generation of a comprehensive plant-immune network using versatile pathogens; 2) construction of large-scale dynamic transcriptional regulatory networks; 3) pathogen-mediated network perturbations both at protein-protein and protein-DNA levels.

Plantae.org is a new way to connect to other plant scientists

Submitted by Dr. Rebecca Dickstein
Southern Section Representative to ASPB



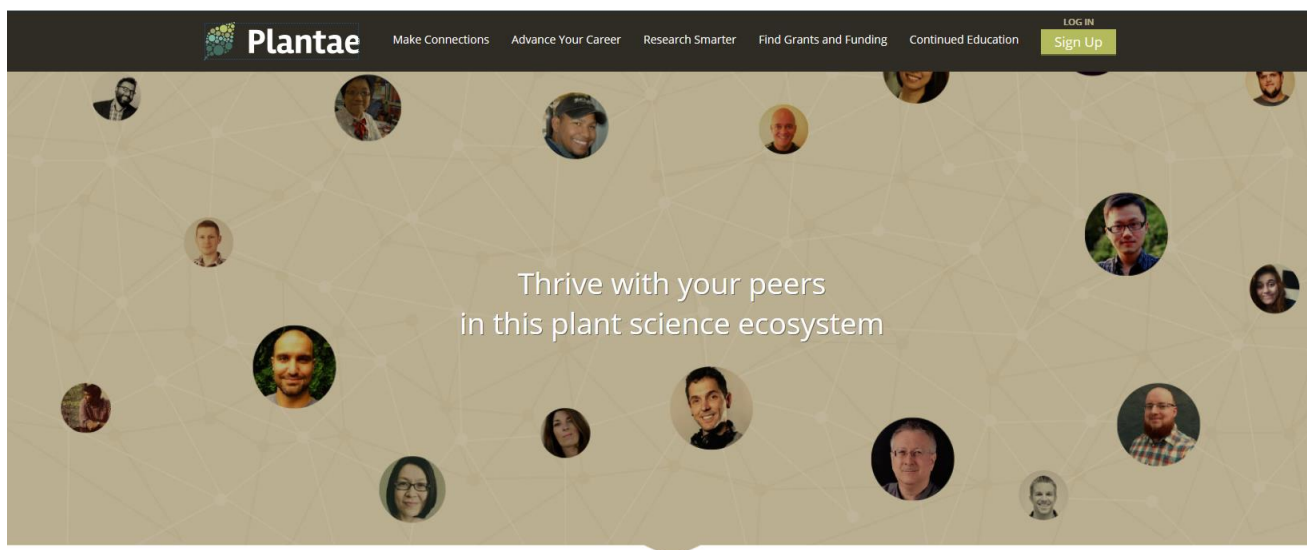
Plantae.org is coming! By the time you read this, it may be operational – if not, then check back at the site on a weekly basis. Plantae.org is a new venture for our parent society, ASPB, in collaboration with the Global Plant Council and will link up plant scientists around the globe, including ASPB members, and members of the Southern Section as well. But Plantae.org will do so much more than just that...

All plant biology students and professionals are invited to join Plantae.org. Plantae.org is open and free of charge to use at the initial level, although there will be a charge, approximately equivalent to the fees that are now charged for ASPB membership, for increased level of engagement. There will also be a highest level of membership, that will cost more, but that cost is less than the cost several years ago of being a member of ASPB and having a personal subscription to the paper version of one of the journals.

Plantae.org is envisioned as a place where plant biologists, whether they are students, academics or work in the private sector, can come together to connect, focused on topics and research interests. It will be a secure environment for plant biologists where they might not otherwise have a platform to do so, without unsolicited advertisements or other intrusions from third parties. Plantae.org is envisioned as a platform for crowdsourced ideas as well as content from ASPB and tools and other resources from and for the plant science community. It will provide a foundation, along with a set of tools for teams and groups to self-organize and work together online.

Even the name, Plantae.org, came from our plant biology community. People suggested names via the ASPB blog and then voted for a list of choices submitted by the community. Plantae.org was one of the top choices voted on by our community of plant scientists.

Keep checking Plantae.org – it will be operational very soon.



ASPB's Plant Science Exchange portal is a robust digital ecosystem where connections, content, tools and services help researchers, students, industry professionals and educators thrive.

Plant Biology 2015

JULY 26-30 | MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA



Dr. Rebecca Dickstein, Southern Section Representative to ASPB

Plant Biology 2015 was held in Minneapolis, MN at the end of July. It was a big meeting, with about 1500 participants, and the topics discussed there ranged over almost the whole of plant biology and plant physiology. It can be almost overwhelming to look at the scope of what plant biologists' research encompasses. You can go to <http://plantbiology.aspb.org/> and download the official program at <http://plantbiology.aspb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PlantBiology2015ProgramFINAL.pdf>. As you'll be able to see, there were five major symposia on: phytohormones, plant interactions in the rhizosphere, epigenetic variation, plant-microbe interactions and water and salinity in plants. There were numerous minisymposia, various workshops on career, granting and tool topics, and approximately 900 posters from participants from 40 countries. It was an outstanding conference, and I learned a lot about what is new in plant biology.

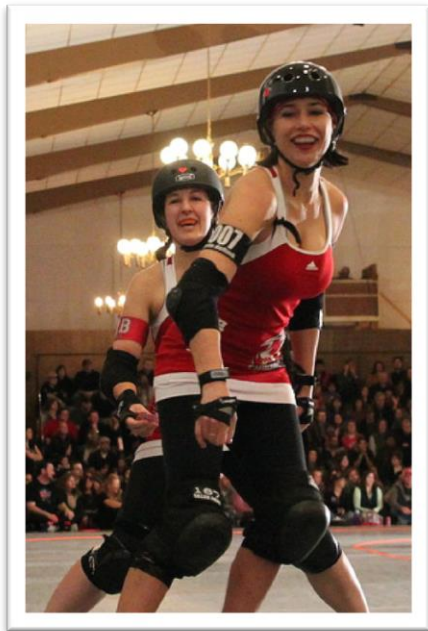
This was my first year to participate in the annual Plant Biology meeting as the representative of the Southern section. Because of this role, I participated in several ASPB governance committee meetings in addition to the meeting itself. As your representative, I serve on the Executive and Membership committees. There was much discussion about the new electronic platform, Plantae.org, which will go "live" soon and is a new way for ASPB members to connect with each other. The Membership committee's workshop on careers in industry was bustling, with round-table discussions from industry scientists and participants switching tables every 15-20 minutes to talk to different people about industry jobs.

There was also a party to celebrate the long-awaited launch of the second edition of Buchanan's textbook "Biochemistry and Molecular Biology of Plants". Also new this year were tracks for minisymposia and "neighborhoods" for posters, both attempts to organize the diverse interests of Plant Biology 2015 meeting participants. The idea of minisymposium tracks was to try to organize the minisymposia so that one could hear all the talks on a related topic on sequential days, rather than have them at the same time, in competition with one another. Poster "neighborhoods" grouped posters on similar topics in the same physical area, which made it much easier to see the posters in a specific area of plant biology and to run into scientists working in related areas. For me, this made it easier to navigate the conference. I wonder what others thought about this organization and if it will be repeated in the next Plant Biology meeting.

Since I've been in plant biology for a while now, Plant Biology 2015 enabled me to see people I've known from as long back as my post-doc years when I entered plant biology, as well as meet new scientists and to put faces with names I only knew from the literature. Plant biology students may not realize that their colleagues in the lab today and those students and post-docs they meet at conferences will be their colleagues in the future.

Next year, Plant Biology 2016 will be within the Southern section's geographic area, making it easier for those of us in our section to participate.

**Plan on Austin, TX, July 7-13, 2016,
for ASPB 2016!**



Bella deRink, right, with teammate The Merchant of Menace. Photo by O-Jen Ishii.

Better Know a Member

Most of you know her as Dr. Ashlee McCaskill, 2014-2015 Chair of SS-ASPB and Associate Professor of Plant Biology at the University of North Georgia. But to roller derby fans in the Atlanta area she is better known as Bella deRink #007. That's right, your former chair was a roller derby queen. Although she retired from the sport last year after seven years on the track, Ashlee continues to support and promote women's flat track roller derby—the fastest growing amateur sport in the world! Ashlee began her involvement in roller derby during her last years in graduate school in Ithaca, NY. She and several other people formed the Ithaca League of Women Rollers in 2007, with the SufferJets being the flagship team. After relocating to Georgia, Ashlee continued to play the sport with the Atlanta Roller Girls.

While most people of an age have memories of the theatrical roller derby on television, it's important to know that the sensationalized dramatics of the 1970's have been put aside in favor of serious sport. The current version of derby is a

strictly amateur sport that draws participants from a wide cross section of society. Ashlee shared the track with fellow Ph.D.'s, pharmacists, mothers, teachers, nurses and even an ordained Methodist minister. Modern roller derby provides not only a competitive athletic venue for women, but it also promotes comradery and community and, most important, fosters self-confidence. This is especially true of the junior roller derby teams that are popping up all over the country, which are for girls in the 6-17 age range.

Another important feature of modern roller derby is the motto "For the Skater, By the Skater". This embodies the ethos of flat track derby, which is a totally DIY sport. The skaters run the general business of the leagues, set the rules (as voting members of the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, the international governing body) and play the sport! Even though the recent incarnation of roller derby has a serious aspect to it, the players (and fans) have not lost their senses of humor and spirit of fun. Skaters still adopt "skate names" and personas, jeer leaders rouse the audience and costumed fans provide great people watching! For more information on flat track roller derby or to find a league near you, go to www.wftda.com.

**Interested in being featured in the
"Better Know a Member" section of an
upcoming newsletter?**

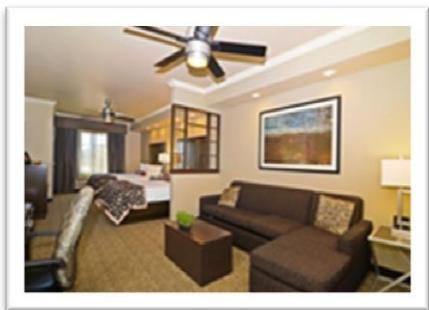
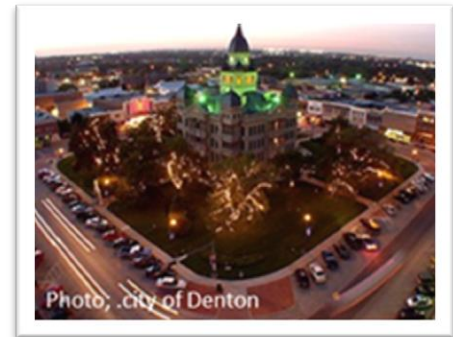


**Contact the SS-ASPB Chair
Dr. Rick Turley!**



SS-ASPB 2016 in Denton, TX

Mark your calendars. The 2016 SS-ASPB Annual Meeting will be held in University of North Texas (UNT), Denton, from April 2nd through 4th. Voted “Number 1 Small Town in America” by Business Insider in 2012, Denton is situated 36 miles north of Dallas and Fort Worth. Denton is a friendly, vibrant city with much to offer from the century-old courthouse and the quaint town-square to world-class shopping, and museums. The 2016 Meeting will be held in UNT’s Environmental Education, Science & Technology (EESAT) building and the Gateway Center. EESAT building houses a large auditorium and several class rooms with audio-visual facilities and several rooms for poster presentations. The theme for the 2016 Kriton-Hatzios Symposium is “*Genome Editing: Applications in Plant Science and Agriculture*”. A number of excellent speakers are scheduled to discuss the latest developments in this area of research at this meeting. The 2016 meeting promises to keep our tradition of promoting plant science and education especially among graduate students, and scientific exchange. Please join us in Denton for this meeting.



Accommodations: Lodging has been arranged with Best Western Premier Crown Chase Inn & Suites, 2450 Brinker Rd, Denton, TX 76208 Tel: (940) 387-1000. (For online reservations visit: <http://book.bestwestern.com/bestwestern/groupSearch.do?groupId=L56SK8Z1>). The hotel is an oasis of warm Texas ambience with spacious rooms, conveniently located just off I-35E and close to a variety of restaurants and the Golden Triangle Mall. Enjoy luxurious rooms at reduced rates for meeting attendees, the beautiful swimming pool the hot tub, 24/7 access to the hotel gym. A shuttle service will be available between the meeting site at UNT campus and the hotel. If you need additional information regarding the meeting, please contact either Dr. Nihal Dharmasiri (nihal@txstate.edu) or Dr. Rebecca Dickstein (Rebecca.Dickstein@unt.edu).

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