Schwann cells is dependent on bacterial viability.” The award included a one-year ASM membership, a certificate, and an online subscription to the ASM journal of her choice. Peterson, Kolter, Rivera, Martinez, and incoming SBM President Adalberto Pessoa Junior discussed future collaborations which include the ongoing provision of the ASM Best Abstract Award and an ASM-SBM roundtable at the 2011 Brazilian Congress.

Peterson and Rivera also took advantage of the opportunity to plan other activities in Brazil with regional ASM liaisons Leda Mendoças-Hagler (Southeast Brazil), Luciana Leonil (Northern Brazil), and Rosane Christine Hahn (Central Brazil).

Says Kolter, “I was honored to be invited to deliver the opening-night keynote address and absolutely thrilled to partake in the energy and enthusiasm of Brazilian microbiologists. I sincerely hope that the ASM and SBM continue to interact so that the natural synergies already evident at the meeting flourish for many years to come!” ASM greatly appreciates the significant efforts of ASM Ambassador Rivera in the coordination of the ASM activities, as well as the enthusiastic support from the SBM.

LabCap Introductory Visit to Vietnam

The Vietnamese Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-Vietnam selected ASM’s International Laboratory Capacity Building Program (LabCap), which is governed by the International Laboratory Capacity Building Committee and housed within the International Board, to provide technical assistance to Vietnam’s national laboratory networks for general microbiology and tuberculosis (TB). In fiscal year 2009, ASM LabCap will focus on strengthening diagnosis of opportunistic and sexually transmitted infections at select major hospitals, and ensuring that TB liquid culture is performed in Vietnam according to international standards. This will involve training and mentoring of staff at several national laboratory institutes.

ASM consultants Emanuele Borroni and Neil Stingemore joined LabCap Senior Program Specialist Juliano Timm in Vietnam on 26–30 October 2009 to introduce ASM International Programs to key stakeholders involved in the delivery of clinical microbiology and TB services, including local representatives of PEPFAR-Vietnam agencies (CDC, U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], and U.S. Department of Defense) and World Health Organization (WHO), as well as Vietnamese MoH officials. The ASM LabCap team also conducted a preliminary survey of seven laboratories in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC): Hanoi TB Hospital, National Hospital for TB and Respiratory Diseases, National Institute of Dermatology and Venereology, Bach Mai Hospital, Pham Ngoc Thach Hospital, and HCMC District 4 and District Tan Binh TB Units. These laboratories were assessed in terms of diagnostic services performed and existing gaps in infrastructure, biosafety, human resources, and quality systems.

In the coming months, ASM consultants will return to Vietnam to spend more time at some of these laboratories to assist in the implementation of new biosafety measures, diagnostic testing training, SOP development, and quality assurance/quality control practices. The consultants will also map venues to roll out workshops and courses.

Development of this publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement Number U62/CCU325119–04 from the Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHSTP), Global AIDS Program (GAP). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of CDC.

ASM LabCap New Partnership with PATH

ASM’s International Laboratory Capacity Building Program (LabCap) is a partner of a Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH)-led consortium, which has been awarded the “Tuberculosis Task Order 2015” (TB TO 2015), an Indefinite Quantity Contract (IQC) from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Other IQC consortium subcontractors to PATH are Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND), Initiatives, Inc., Management Sciences for Health, and the University of California-San Francisco.

The objective of TB TO 2015 is to provide short- and long-term technical assistance to support the scale-up of the STOP TB Strategy and the Global Response to Multi-Drug Resistant and Extensively Drug Resistant TB in USAID priority countries. Key technical areas of work for this five-year Task Order (with a $53.8 million ceiling) are: (i) expand and enhancement of all aspects of quality DOTS, including laboratory strengthening; (ii) support programmatic management of drug-resistant TB and TB/HIV coinfection; (iii) provide technical assistance to countries for applications to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria; (iv) build capacity for implementing advocacy, communication, and social mobilization activities for TB control; and (v) introduce new tools, especially new diagnostic technologies.

Through this TB TO 2015 funding mechanism, ASM LabCap, in partnership with the other PATH-led consortium members, will begin to provide technical assistance this year to India and Tanzania to build in-country capacity for rapid and accurate TB diagnosis.

Branches: ASM Activities at the Local Level

Lessons Learned: a Guide on Maintaining Branch Excellence and Member Value Through Sun, Sand, and Microbiology!

Happy New Year! For those buried by winter, we thought you might enjoy a trip to Florida! In keeping with our theme of Helping Branches Excel, Dr. Christina Kellogg, Branch Councillor and Past President of the Florida Branch, recounts below how rethinking Branch organizational structure and responding to member needs produces synergy and enhanced member value.

When I returned to Florida in 2001 and joined the Florida Branch, it was a small, happy family. Membership embraced a core group of laboratories that met annually so students could practice presentation skills. The principle investigators hung out and drank beer with presenters.
Sound like fun? It was! It was comfortable, collegial and we definitely knew each others’ names. But, people moved on (e.g., new jobs, graduation). Many left the state, and the size of the Branch dwindled as people felt the meetings lacked scientific diversity.

In 2005, our incoming president left the Branch. Terri Slifko moved to the presidency and I became President-Elect. Taking control earlier than planned, we spent time rethinking the Branch. We agreed the Branch must change. Either we had to grow the Branch into a recognizable asset that would attract participation or we would have to consider merging with the Southeastern Branch (which contains Alabama, Georgia, and northern Florida). We decided to invest in the expansion and diversification of the Florida Branch.

Today, the Florida Branch is thriving. Our 2009 annual meeting in Islamorada in the Florida Keys had the largest attendance on record. Our membership boasts a mixture of academic, government, and corporate laboratories. Each year we sponsor new graduate and undergraduate presenters. How did this happen? The key factors follow.

(1) **Attract New Blood.** This is obvious, but don’t waste your time. The early postcard and e-mail campaigns to microbiologists at universities, community colleges, and small businesses, generated some interest and brought in a few new people. But, the most successful technique by far was to “strong-arm friends.” This method attracted our current Branch officers and new blood (I am both a victim and a perpetrator!). The plan: An energetic young person becomes new faculty; you invite them to a Branch meeting so they can meet microbiologists in the area/state; and you drive them to the meeting. While they are captive during the drive, you make them “an offer they can’t refuse.” Invite them to become Branch-active: pitch them a specific office, ask them to head up a committee, etc. Initially, they accept to humor you, but after becoming involved, they develop a personal commitment to the Branch. Repeat as needed. Remember: people respond to people.

(2) **Establish an Order of Succession.** After our Branch lost officers through resignation or relocation, there was uncertainty. Each new president had less information and the leadership task became overwhelming while trying to plan the annual meeting, apply for ASM funding, etc. Today, the Florida Branch has established a line of succession: from Secretary to President-Elect to President and finally, National Councilor. Succession offers experience and training from a predecessor. Branches are surprised by the long-term commitment of Florida Branch officers. However, each officer’s duties are simple and succinct to prevent burnout. Most importantly, they learn the progression of duties through tenure, removing the stress and terror of volunteering.

(3) **Location, Location, Location.** Historically, the Florida Branch gathered at a beach hotel over a weekend. Attractive meeting destinations were important to speakers and allowed members to include family while they caught up on science and networking. The increased enthusiasm and attendance at our 2009 Florida Keys meeting, with a unanimous vote to repeat the location next year, was an indicator of the importance of a great location. Your Branch might not have beaches, but choosing somewhere affordable and fun (e.g., historic districts, state or national parks, or theme parks) offers your members the option to include families on a minivacation. Remember: engaging speakers + a diverse, topical program + a winning location = a great meeting.

Organizations often reach a point where the few do everything, all the time. Notwithstanding the dedication involved, it’s not healthy for the organization. New people bring fresh ideas and heightened enthusiasm, and offer die-hards the time to experiment with new directions. The Florida Branch has changed . . . but it is still the best place for students to gain skills and for principle investigators to hang out and drink beer with younger colleagues!

Not a Branch member? On the fence about joining? Use the events tab and other resources within the ASM Community and websites to find your Branch home. Whether you seek frequent peer networking or inclusive scientific programming on a smaller scale, the 35 ASM Branches offer exceptional professional value.

You can elect to join or renew Branch membership at Branch meetings or go to the ASM eStore. The majority of Branches offer a join/renew option at the ASM eStore, so renew/join your Branch when you renew your ASM membership.

We hope to see you at a Branch event very soon. Go to: http://www.asm.org /Membership/index.asp?bid=23253 or to the ASM website at http://www.asm.org, toggle the dropdown menu, Membership/ Branches/Branch Meetings to discover upcoming Branch opportunities.

Michael G. Schmidt  
Chair, Branch Organization Committee

Christina Kellogg  
Councilor and Past President, Florida Branch