



Profile Young Perspectives

Last year marked the tenth anniversary of AIChE's Young Professionals Advisory Board (YPAB) and its transformation into the Young Professionals Committee — which is tasked with engaging younger generations of AIChE members and leaders. Wendy Young Reed, a business development manager at Chemstations (Houston, TX) and a recent AIChE director, has been a vital part of these and other successes. Her commitment to AIChE, and the value she places on the relationships she has nurtured as an AIChE leader, keep her involved in Institute life — presently as a member of the Chemical Engineering Technology Operating Council (CTOC) and a founder of AIChE's Water Initiative (now the International Society for Water Solutions, ISWS).

Born in Helena, MT, Reed moved to Texas when she was three months old. (“I got there as fast as I could,” says the proud Aggie.) From the age of eight, she enjoyed regional success as a competitive figure skater. That experience “taught me perseverance, and how to handle success and failure,” she says, noting, too, the sacrifices her parents made. “They always said that as long as I was driven to work hard at it, they would support me in any way they could.” By age 15, though, her technical progress had plateaued. “I was about six inches taller than most other skaters, so physics was working against me,” she concedes. She decided that pursuing academics would give her a better chance of success than continuing with skating.

In high school, she took an interest in cleaning up water pollution, and saw chemical engineering as a way of getting to the root of the problem. While studying at Texas A&M Univ. in the mid-1990s, she had her first AIChE experience as a leader of the A&M student chapter.

Although her first engineering jobs sent her to the East coast, the Aggie soon returned to Texas to work for Solutia, and joined AIChE's South Texas (Houston) Section. There, in 2002, she took the initiative to launch a local Young Professionals (YP) subsection.

“Around that time,” she explains, “AIChE recognized that membership in the undergrad-to-35 age range was declining. I was asked to participate in the founding YPAB group, along with YP leaders from other sections.” Reed chaired the YPAB from 2005 to 2007, a period when the group expanded its support to other YP sections and increased its mentoring of undergraduates — particularly at student conferences, where the YPAB sponsored career workshops and lively networking parties. “Fun times,” she recalls, adding that “being involved with the other highly energetic members of YPAB was truly inspirational. I still keep in touch with many of them.”

Today, Reed takes satisfaction in seeing some of the young professionals that the YPAB mentored among the rising leaders of AIChE.

Her work with YPAB led to deeper AIChE involvement, including chairing the Membership Committee and becoming the youngest member of AIChE's Board of Directors when she was elected to a three-year term in 2007. Although she had fewer years of work experience, she says that she appreciated the respect with which her Board colleagues received her ideas. “The leadership experiences reinforced the importance of listening, but also not being afraid to speak up when I had something of value to contribute.”

Meanwhile, in her engineering career, Reed found herself “migrating toward the business side of things.” After technical roles in water, wastewater, and process water treatment at GE Water, she moved into sales full-time at Chemstations, the CHEMCAD simulation software company, in 2011.

Aside from the satisfaction of working to reduce environmental impacts and improve safety, she says that she most enjoys traveling to meet clients. “That's my favorite part — getting to learn about people and their lives, and hopefully making their jobs easier,” she says. “Since my earlier work had a lot of variety — chemicals, pharmaceuticals, refining — I can honestly tell a customer that I've been ‘on their side of the table,’ and how CHEMCAD can help them.”

As a driver behind the creation of the ISWS, Reed notes that “the world is facing tough challenges in water, energy, and the environment, but I believe that engineers and scientists will always come through with solutions. It's critical that we encourage the next generation of engineers, so they can carry on this work.”

She notes that, with AIChE's expanding global reach, there are more opportunities than ever for young engineers to play a role in the Institute. “The Young Professionals Committee is an ideal place to get involved, as it is connected to many entities of AIChE.” She adds, “Young engineers tend to be passionate about making a difference on global issues. So, participation in a group like the Center for Energy Initiatives, Institute for Sustainability, or ISWS would be a good fit.”

As she begins a term on AIChE's CTOC, Reed believes that it is a duty and privilege to give back to her professional society. “I also enjoy continuing to make new connections from all over the world as AIChE expands its global reach.”

She hopes that her legacy, and that of the YPAB, is the recognition that young engineers can make valuable contributions if they are encouraged and mentored along the way.

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