

## MSSA PRESIDENT'S REPORT – DECEMBER 2005

At the 2004 AGM, the MSSA members elected an executive committee with a mix of old and new faces. In my term of office as President in 2005 I benefited from the solid support and experience of Alan Hall, John Soley, Jan Neethling and Japie Engelbrech; and I was inspired by the energy and ideas of Miemie Nzula, Alistair Douglas, Tony Bruton and Ike Achilonu.

MSSA is a society with proud traditions, and the Boris Balinsky centenary year has been an opportunity to celebrate part of our history and the life of one of our founders. Elly Grossman, although retired from the executive committee, used this centenary as an opportunity to take on extra work: some of the fruits of her labours can be enjoyed at MSSA 2005, including a wonderful display on the life and work of Boris Balinsky. Thanks also to Elly for nominating Prof Barry Fabian, who gave a superb Boris Balinsky lecture at MSSA 2005. Completing our traditional duo of invited speakers, Dr Debbie Stokes travelled from Cambridge to present the John Matthews Memorial Lecture and to share her expertise in ESEM through presenting a workshop.

The conference is another proud MSSA tradition. A lot of the business of any given year revolves around the annual conference, held at UKZN Pietermaritzburg in 2005 under the able leadership of Tony Bruton. Organisation of a conference is very much a team effort, and the team should be congratulated as a whole for a fantastic conference. Nevertheless I understand that Tony has singled out Pat Joubert for elevation to sainthood. I would like to single out Tony Bruton, who in addition to his burdens as conference organiser and exco member, managed to put out two issues of the MSSA newsletter in 2005. (I don't know what he's on but I want some.) Tony reports that our friends in the commercial sector rose magnificently to the MSSA 2005 occasion with financial support - which of course is what makes our annual conference possible. One of the strengths of MSSA is the involvement of the commercial sector, and we must seek ways to enhance this.

The MSSA Trust is something new that I believe will become part of our proud tradition, dedicated to furthering the aims of the microscopy community. After the IFSEM conference in Durban in 2002, when the Society's coffers were unusually full, the exco had the wisdom to realise that the money could be better utilised than donating it to the taxman. The formation of the MSSA Trust was duly initiated, and has been a protracted process. The Trustees are three respected members of MSSA (Mike Witcomb, Robin Cross and Alan Hall) together with Tim Wood. Mike Witcomb will be giving a report and an update on the MSSA Trust at the 2005 AGM.

The MSSA listserver, organised by Trevor Sewell of UCT, has been quiet this year (except for the irrepressible Luc Harmsen). I myself found it a struggle to put up a message on the listserver - until I found that my email address had changed since last I wrote to the listserver, which no longer recognised me as a result! Can I advise everyone to check their details. Trevor also took over as Editor-in Chief of the MSSA Proceedings at short notice, producing the 2005 Proceedings without seeming to turn a hair (where *do* we find these multitasking experts?), for which I am enormously grateful.

The MSSA website continues to be maintained, updated and hosted by Luc Harmsen - a generally thankless task for which I thank him on behalf of the society.

Two of our new Exco members, Miemie Nzula and Alistair Douglas, took on the task of strategising how to increase student membership (some of their suggestions appeared in the October MSSA Newsletter). Increasing our student membership is a vital part of growing the society, something we must do if we are not to fade away. Looking to the future, I believe we must put our energy and imagination into the growth of the society nationally and regionally. If we can achieve this growth, then we will benefit not only the MSSA but also science and society. We must do more to encourage new members of MSSA and also to encourage young people to make science a career, particularly those for whom this has not been an easy path. The annual MSSA conference provides support and incentives for young (and not-so-young) scientists through bursaries and sponsored prizes. An exciting new prize this year has been sponsored by ALS/JEOL for the most promising black microscopist. The prize is a trip to make a presentation at the Microscience 2006 conference in the UK - an opportunity to encourage new scientists and to showcase our society at the same time. In the long term I believe we need to seek more ways like this to put MSSA on the map (so you don't need a microscope to find us).

MSSA has a great history, now we need to make a great future. I had a wonderful year. I hope you did too.

Candy Lang  
President: MSSA

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