

Chuck Kolb and his Service to the American Chemical Society

By Michael P. Filosa

Chuck joined the ACS in 1969 while he was a graduate student at Princeton. He became a member of NESACS when he came to Massachusetts for his job at Aerodyne Research, Inc. He served the Northeastern ACS Local Section in many ways; he was a Trustee, Chair in 1991, Member and Chair of the Richards Medal Committee (1998-2006), and Member and Chair of the Esselen Award Committee (2007-2011). He received the Henry A. Hill Award in 2005 for Outstanding Service to NESACS.

In addition to the many boards and committees on which Chuck served for the National Research Council and the National Academy of Sciences, Chuck also had significant roles in National ACS. He served on the Committee on Environmental Improvement and was its Chair (2006-2008), and on the Presidential Task Force on Enhancing Innovation and Competitiveness. He served on Editorial advisory boards and Journal Editor Selection Committees. He was designated an ACS Fellow in its inaugural class of 2009.

As a result of his extensive leadership efforts within the ACS, he was a candidate, albeit unsuccessful, for President-Elect of the ACS in 2013. A few excerpts from his campaign illustrate the quality of his thinking, and show clearly why he was successful as an entrepreneur and a leader.

Shortly after I became president of the company I lead, it became clear that our “research for hire” business model was not sustainable, despite a very talented and productive staff of scientists and engineers. I devised a new strategy focusing our research on a few critical global issues, including environmental sustainability, energy technology, and military remote sensing, and our development efforts on key technologies required to address them.

A quarter of a century later, we’re still executing a continuous improvement version of that plan. Our company is thriving, with our research capabilities and our advanced instrument technologies in high demand. By aligning our scientific capabilities with important problems whose solutions require fundamental insights, we have been able to expand both our skills and our revenues.

It's a great honor to ask for your support as a candidate for the presidency of the American Chemical Society. Today's ACS is a vibrant and vital organization, successfully serving many of our members' professional needs. It is also a very important source of scientific information and insight for both our profession and, properly presented, our planet's policymakers.

However, we live in a very challenging and rapidly changing world. Venerable institutions can become outmoded and increasingly irrelevant surprisingly quickly. Just think about Bell Labs, Digital Equipment Corp., Eastman Kodak, or America Online.

It is vitally important that we ensure ACS's future relevance and effectiveness. We need an ACS that will serve our current members as they deal with today's scientific and economic challenges. But we also need an ACS that will be prepared to meet the needs of our youngest members over their (~50 year) professional lives. It must also continue providing a large fraction of the ever-expanding scientific information needed by an increasingly complex world. This can only be achieved by leaders who can envision what a successful ACS will look like 50 years from now and can chart the course.

Chuck was an important figure within our local and national society of chemists. He and his contributions to science and society will be greatly missed. May he rest in peace.