

## Report: ACS Community Activities

# Celebrating 20 Years of National Chemistry Week

by Ingrid Montes and Judith Jankowski



This year marks the 20th anniversary of National Chemistry Week (NCW). Each year NCW, a program of the American Chemical Society (ACS), informs millions of people about the positive contributions of chemistry to everyday life. The program is designed to reach the public, particularly elementary and secondary school children, with positive messages about chemistry. Thousands of ACS volunteers, teachers, and students celebrate NCW in their communities and schools.

During the fourth week of every October, these NCW enthusiasts can be found organizing hands-on activities and demonstrations at malls, museums, schools, stores, and neighborhoods, to name a few. Their passion for celebrating chemistry each year has captured the attention of thousands of children who anxiously wait for the exciting and fun hands-on activities relating to NCW's theme.

This year's theme is "The Many Faces of Chemistry", which will emphasize chemistry and careers. The theme gives volunteers the chance to highlight the many different types of chemistry careers, particularly those that can be found within their communities. It also emphasizes the various types of people in those careers ranging from a laboratory chemist to a science teacher or a chemical industry executive. What a way to celebrate the many different people who have made major contributions to the chemical profession.

### NCW's History

National Chemistry Week began as National Chemistry Day, and was a vision of then ACS President, George C. Pimentel. In 1986, Pimentel stated that...

National Chemistry Day is a bold and exciting undertaking for us. Its success will be measured, in the short term, by the number of people reached by our efforts. Over the long term, we will measure our success by the continued use of chemistry to solve societal problems and to improve the quality of life for us all.

This visionary statement led the ACS Board of Directors to establish National Chemistry Day (NCD), which was celebrated November 6, 1987. A parade spanning two blocks in Washington, DC, helped kicked off the celebration with 173 out of 182 ACS local sections participating in the festivities within their communities. NCD was so well-received by the general public that in 1988 it received the highest honor accorded for excellence in public relations and was awarded the Public Relations Society of America Silver Anvil.

The original intent was to celebrate NCD on a biannual basis. Because of the overwhelming enthusiasm and support shown in its debut year, NCD was expanded to a week-long celebration and renamed, "National Chemistry Week" (NCW) in 1989. In 1993, NCW officially became an annual event, although many ACS local sections had already been celebrating it annually.

### The Fun and Excitement of Chemistry—NCW, Then...in 1987



ACS staff members celebrate the first National Chemistry Day on November 6, 1987, by parading through the streets around ACS headquarters in Washington, DC.



### Beyond the ACS Local Sections

NCW continues to be one of the main outreach programs conducted by the ACS local sections. After 20 years, more than 80% of local sections continue to participate in NCW. The popularity of the program has grown beyond the ACS local sections. In fact, data collected from NCW coordinators in the last five years shows that more than 40% of people participating in activities are non-ACS members.

Many teachers (primary and secondary), high school students, college students, and college professors find ways to incorporate the annual celebration into their curriculum independent of an ACS local section. They are aware of NCW because of their own experiences or information received through their teaching networks or publications, or resources collected at various science educators' conventions, like the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), the CHED-sponsored Biennial Conferences on Chemical Education, and the *Journal of Chemical Education*.

Many of those planning celebrations independent of an ACS local section know about NCW through their experiences as an ACS Student Affiliate, one of the largest groups supporting NCW. Although National Chemistry Week is an informal education program, it also provides educators an

## The Fun and Excitement of Chemistry—NCW Now



These children, possibly the future faces of chemistry, are participating in NCW activities in various outreach events from around the country.

opportunity to involve students in community service. ACS Student Affiliates chapters give students the opportunity to plan and implement activities with guidance from faculty advisors. Students seek opportunities to initiate a project, acquire funding, and solicit assistance from chapter members, thus developing leadership skills. Through NCW community service, students also have the opportunity to consciously explore and practice professional ethics. As they respond to various societal issues, they experience the role that scientists play in society and see how science shapes society and how society shapes science. Finally, NCW activities can promote cross-cultural awareness and an ability to work effectively within diverse cultures and groups: skills that are critical to successful professionals.

### NCW: Its Contributions to Community Outreach

Community outreach programs provide more than just opportunities for ACS members and NCW enthusiasts to plan activities in their communities. The ACS Office of Community Activities also provides research-based models for facilitating effective outreach programs. Since the first National Chemistry Day in 1987, outreach as content delivery has quickly evolved into a deeper exploration into “how” the content is delivered. This includes exploring issues of age appropriateness of material and how the material fits into national curriculum standards. The Office of Community Activities offers resources for coordinators, teachers, and the public including the *Community Outreach Manual, Celebrating Chemistry*, sample lesson plans, tips for hands-on activity facilitators, and “Cool Facts” for each NCW theme. These resources are designed to help community outreach coordinators communicate the NCW message and to allow volunteers to carry out their celebrations and events.

### Celebrating 20 Years of NCW

During the ACS fall national meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, the Committee on Community Activities (CCA) and the ACS Office of Community Activities will celebrate the anniversary and its theme, “The Many Faces of Chemistry”. A special reception will take place on Sunday, August 19 to recognize the volunteers who have played a pivotal role and to thank all those who have contributed to making NCW the most popular community outreach activity sponsored by the American Chemical Society. On Monday, August 20, CCA will sponsor a symposium as part of the Division of Chemical Education's programming that will feature presentations taking

a detailed look at NCW's history, volunteerism, and ways to effectively communicate chemistry.

More information about the 2007 National Chemistry Week anniversary celebration can be found on the NCW Web site, [chemistryweek.org](http://chemistryweek.org), starting in July 2007. Visit [chemistry.org/committees/cca.html](http://chemistry.org/committees/cca.html) (accessed May 2007) for NCW events taking place at the ACS Boston National Meeting.

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