

Carol E. Henderson,<sup>1</sup> J.D.

## President's Editorial—AAFS and Forensic Science: The Next 60 Years

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences is now well into the second half of its first 100 years of existence. In that time we have not only grown to 6528 members, but have changed as forensic science has changed. We have added new sections, like Digital and Multimedia Sciences. We have introduced initiatives like the Forensic Science Educational Conferences, Forensic Science Education Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC), and the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB). We have also enhanced the professionalism of the Academy by updating the ethics code and policies and procedures.

There is no ignoring the impact of forensic science today. Our initiatives ensure we will be better able to deal with the new developments in science and technology which are advancing at a rapid pace. Forensic science also is not local, but global—we are all working in concert to address criminal justice issues, terrorism, health issues, and public safety. It is absolutely indispensable work, which provides hope and ensures justice. It is an exciting and challenging time to be in our profession.

Unfortunately, the positive interest in forensic science by the general public is offset by the skepticism of some communities about the competency of practitioners and the reliability of the evidence arising from their work. These opposing perspectives create unique challenges to all of us because we are committed to the profession of forensic science: we neither wish to be appreciated on the basis of our CSI entertainment value nor do we wish to be regarded as lacking competence and objectivity. Our mission that the American Academy of Forensic Sciences is a multidisciplinary professional organization that provides leadership to advance science and its application to the legal system, together with our objectives of promoting education, fostering research, improving practice, and encouraging collaboration provides us with a road map for meeting future challenges.

The ability to anticipate changes to the profession and to be proactive were some of the points I made in my inaugural speech as President of the Academy. The theme for the 2009 meeting is Forensic Science: Envisioning and Creating the Future. Here are the initiatives we are pursuing to shape the future of forensic science and the future of the Academy: Communication, Education and Research, Collaboration, and Ethics. These are the cornerstones that are necessary for a healthy profession and professional association. We all need to pursue these goals and anticipate future demands.

*Communication:* I am old enough to remember mimeograph machines, typewriters, and the brick phone. There have been incredible leaps in technology that facilitate communication. We need to utilize the technology that resonates with those we want to

reach—the future forensic scientists—the “digital natives” as Howard Gardner, the author of *Five Minds for the Future* calls them—so we need to use podcasts, vodcasts, distance education, YouTube. We are developing podcast primers on each area of forensic science. Also, since the past is prologue, we need to record oral histories of many of our members—who possess incredible knowledge so that we can pass it on to our future generations. AAFS possesses great human capital—we can harness jointly the cumulative knowledge of the experienced members of the Academy and the energy and enthusiasm of the young forensic scientists to move AAFS and forensic science forward. Any learned society inevitably depends on its senior members for leadership. Their wisdom and knowledge are invaluable. However, the inspirations and new ideas presented by the young forensic scientists propel us into the future.

*Education and Research:* We have many audiences to educate—forensic scientists, students, law enforcement, legal practitioners, judges, and the general public. Beyond the new technology I



FIG. 1—Carol E. Henderson, President, 2008–2009, American Academy of Forensic Sciences.

<sup>1</sup>President, 2008–2009, American Academy of Forensic Sciences, Stetson University College of Law, 1401 61st Street, South, Gulfport, FL 33707.

previously discussed, we need to look at increasing resources for the AAFS educational efforts like the Forensic Science Educators Conferences and for the Forensic Science Foundation to encourage forensic science scholarship. Research is a fundamental defining characteristic of any branch of science. This year we applied for and received a \$300,000 NIJ grant for research by students in FE-PAC accredited programs. The Five for Forensics initiative will also raise money for research, a critical component in securing the future of forensic science. This initiative is an example of how we can use existing strengths within the Academy—the FSF and our committed membership—to give us an enhanced research profile.

*Collaboration:* We are a unique multidisciplinary organization; we bring together diverse groups and opinions. We are expanding our international collaborations as well as educational outreach and will continue our relationships with national associations such as the Council of Scientific Society Presidents, 60 societies that represent more than 1.4 million scientists and educators. We have

created relationships with the ABA Science and Technology Law Section, AAAS, IACP, and the IAI as well as other professional associations. We should look towards collaborating with even more professional associations.

*Ethics:* The Academy plays an important role in forensic science by providing ethical guidance, through codes of ethics, enforcement of those codes, and the mentoring of young forensic scientists.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as President of the Academy. I am confident that AAFS can continue to lead the forensic sciences in the direction needed today, and for the next 60 years. We must neither avoid the challenges nor forget our responsibilities to society. Reliable scientific evidence must be seen as a solid foundation for assuring public safety and justice. It is vital that AAFS forges the path for all those practicing in the forensic sciences, whether members of the Academy or not. The vitality and clarity of vision that AAFS provides forensic science is essential for its development and success.