

Profile

NORMAN O.V. SONNTAG



Norman O.V. Sonntag, technical director for Southland Chemical Division in Dallas, Texas, earlier this month became AOCS' ninth president from Texas (Felix Paquin being the first). While the lanky, slightly flamboyant and humor-loving Sonntag may fit the Hollywood stereotype of a gregarious Texan, he is (as Paquin was) an immigrant to the Lone Star State. As was AOCS' immediate past president David Firestone, Sonntag is a New York City native, having grown up in Queens.

Sonntag's father was a construction engineer in Brooklyn, perhaps a second-choice occupation as for a few weeks he was a second-string catcher for the Brooklyn Robins, predecessors of the Brooklyn Dodgers, whom Sonntag used to watch play in Ebbets Field. If Norm's father had hoped for a major league baseball player, he was disappointed. "I knew from the time I was a kid that I wanted to be a chemist," Norm says. A younger brother, Stanley, is a voice coach for operatic singers and a part-time professor at Manhattanville College's Department of Music.

A \$1.50 Chemcraft set first introduced the elementary-school-age Sonntag to chemistry. He was entranced, he says, until, like many other neophyte experimenters, he spilled the test tube containing the obligatory "rotten eggs" experiment. Parental discretion curtailed further experimenting in the house; but a cousin had a \$15 Gilbert set to which Sonntag had occasional access. He later attended the citywide Brooklyn Technical High School, where he could take four years of chemistry. During that time, he decided he eventually wanted to attend graduate school at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute to specialize in exploratory organic research.

Like other youths, Sonntag enjoyed prep sports. At 6' 2", he was a logical contender for the basketball team, "but the only time I got to play at Tech was one time when the starting center broke his wrist," he recalls. He did play second base on a prep baseball team for six weeks with future major leaguer Tommy Holmes at first base. He still plays softball, as well as tennis. Indoors, he is an "on-and-off" stamp collector. If there ever was a choice in high school between basketball/baseball practice and extra time in the chem lab, he usually headed for the chem lab, Norm says. When he was graduated in 1937, he received the chemistry medal.

While in the process of earning his B.S. from Brooklyn Polytechnic, Norm went to work for Allied Chemical's National Aniline Division. There he met his future bride, Margie. The two were wed in June 1947 in Astoria, New York.

Sonntag, while pursuing a doctorate through night school, enrolled in an organic analytical chemistry course taught by Colgate-Palmolive's Arnold Gebhart. Sonntag credits Gebhart with influencing him to specialize in fatty acid chemistry. "The course was a real treat," Sonntag says. "I usually solved all of the unknowns correctly within a week or less, but a new Carbide polyol stumped me for two months before final breakthrough." Gebhart's influence also may have led Norm to a job with Colgate-Palmolive after receiving his doctorate in 1951. He has worked on edible and inedible uses of fatty acids ever since. He joined

AOCS in 1953 while at Colgate-Palmolive, but "I was too busy with my work the first five years to get involved much (in AOCS)."

His initial involvement was through technical committee work. That led to an assignment on the Program Planning Committee, of which he later became chairman. He was elected as a member at large of the Governing Board in 1975, then as national secretary in 1977, and as vice-president last year. Succession to the presidency is automatic under AOCS bylaws.

Sonntag also has been busy writing. "I enjoy writing; it forces you to keep up-to-date, it's good discipline," he says. "I wrote a voluminous Chemical Review before I was dry behind the ears (at Colgate-Palmolive) and its acceptance was largely due to key suggestions by Charles Hurd (professor of organic chemistry at Northwestern University)." Sonntag also has written numerous technical articles and contributed seven chapters to Markley's *Fatty Acids*, Pattison's *Fatty Acids and Their Industrial Applications*, and to two works-in-progress, Swern's 4th edition of *Bailey's Industrial Oil and Fat Products*, and to Pryde's AOCS monograph *Fatty Acids*. He also has served as chairman of the Fatty Acid Producers Council research and technical committee (1975-77). Writing may be a family trait. His brother's comprehensive treatise, *The Art of the Song Recital*, recently was published by Prentice-Hall.

"I hold patents with each of five separate - and competitive - fatty acid derivative organizations," he says. He has worked during the past three decades for Colgate-Palmolive, Celanese, Emery Industries, National Dairy Products Corp. Research and Development Division (Humko Division), and was research director at Glyco Chemicals for 11 years before joining Southland in 1977. "I like new and exciting challenges, new outlooks," he says. "After five organizations, I always have left with good relations," then, grinning, "but once in a while I wonder if people think I can't hold a job."

Norm and Margie have two daughters - both named for their parents. Marjorie teaches biology in a large Cherry Hill, NJ, high school; Norma Jean follows a more artistic muse, holding a degree in drama.

Norm is hard to miss at AOCS meetings, if only because of his height. He's also likely to be at any technical session on fatty acids, or industrial uses of fats and oils. Other times, look for a crowd of folks having a good time with lots of laughter. Norm may be repeating, by request, his "lost cheesecake" story, which originally occurred a dozen years ago.

This summer he's technical program chairman for the AOCS Short Course on Industrial Fatty Acids. His charge to 37 faculty members - including former softball teammates John Monick of Colgate-Palmolive and Karl Zilch of Emery Industries - is to prepare comprehensive material of great value to beginners and at the same time challenging to veterans. Won't complying with such guidelines be quite time-consuming for a lot of busy people who are volunteer faculty members? "That's why we asked them to serve on the faculty - because if they're real good, you know they'll be busy. Busy people are the ones who get things done."

He also accents the positive, not asking someone if he will undertake a task, but instead telling the prospective volunteer, "I know you'll want to participate because . . ."

That's the way Norm Sonntag likes things — busy, positive and challenging. He plans that kind of a year for AOCS.

Corporate Members (Continued from page 372A)

Tintometer, U.S.A., Bloomington, New Jersey; Bruce P. McCloskey, rep.

Union Camp Corporation, Wayne, New Jersey; Louis G. Zachary, rep.

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Call for Papers

The Technical Program Committee has issued a call for papers to be presented during the ISF/AOCS World Congress to be held April 27-May 1, 1980, at the New York Hilton in Rockefeller Center in New York City. Papers on every aspect of lipids, oils, fats and related areas are welcome. Please submit three copies of a 100-300 word abstract with title, authors and speaker. Presentations normally are 20 minutes in length. Please also indicate if you wish to make the presentation in the regular manner or in a poster session. The abstracts are to be sent to Dr. Stephen S. Chang, Chairman, Department of Food Science, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

Deadline: November 15, 1979

Obituaries

Harold Olcott



Dr. Harold Olcott, who joined AOCS in 1949, died Feb. 4, 1979. He was 69.

Dr. Olcott was professor emeritus at the University of California-Davis Institute of Marine Resources and Department of Food Science and Technology.

Professor Olcott received his B.S. from the University of Denver in 1928 and an M.S. from the same institution in 1929. His doctorate was awarded in 1931 by the University of Iowa. He was a National Research Council Fellow at Yale, 1931-1932, and a Research Associate in Biochemistry at the University of Iowa from 1932-1937. He moved to the Mellon Institute in 1937 where he was a Research Fellow for four years. In 1941 he joined the staff of the Western Regional Research Laboratory at Albany, California. In 1955 he became a Professor in the Institute of Marine Resources of the University of California, Berkeley, moving to the Davis campus in 1970.

His most recent research dealt with lipid oxidation and the mechanism of action of antioxidants (including the important demonstration of the function of stable free radicals as antioxidants) as well as with certain aspects of scombroid toxicity from fish products.

He was the recipient of numerous awards, including the: American Chemical Society Eli Lilly Award in Biochemistry, 1935; AOCS Bailey Award, 1969; AOCS Bond Award, 1975; Institute of Food Technologists Babcock-Hart Award, 1976; ACS Award for Distinguished Achievement and Service in Agricultural and Food Chemistry, 1976.

He was a Fellow in the Institute of Food Technologists and in the American Institute of Nutrition.

Dr. Olcott was an active member of AOCS, particularly in California section activities. Survivors include his wife, Bernice, and three children. Memorials may be made to the UCD Institute of Marine Resources or the Jewish Fellowship of Davis.

Earl O. Seabold

Earl Ogden Seabold, a member of AOCS since 1942, died unexpectedly Feb. 4, 1979, at his home in Tallahassee, Florida.

Mr. Seabold had lived in Florida since 1971, doing consulting work with various firms. He was affiliated with Acme Hardesy Co. Inc. in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. Mr. Seabold was close to 80 years of age at the time of his death. Survivors include his wife, Evelyn.

H.C. Bennett



H.C. Bennett, a member of AOCS since 1918, died Aug. 7, 1978, at the age of 92. Mr. Bennett had retired in 1959 as technical director of Los Angeles Soap Co.

Mr. Bennett served as a member of the AOCS Governing Board in 1950 and as cochairman for the 33rd annual fall meeting held in Los Angeles in 1959. He also served on several committees, including detergents; glycerine analysis; soap analysis; paper and ink; and advertising.

For a 1977 JAOCS article on long-term members of AOCS, Mr. Bennett provided this biographical summary: "Briefly, I was born in 1886, married in 1917, became a widower in 1955 and have never remarried — as yet."