

## Forever Young: A decade of serving the community at Greater San Francisco Bay Area

John Wang

It was October 5th, 1998. I remember that because it was the traditional Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival or, as folks called it, the Moon Festival. Chinese scientists at Chiron Corporation usually organize a gathering at this occasion, such as a potluck lunch, to celebrate our culture heritage that often turns to be a display of Chinese cuisine of various tastes and attracts people more than just Chinese scientists. This time it was different: we were going to call a meeting to formally launch a new society for Chinese American biopharmaceutical professionals at bay area. To attract people to the meeting, we promised to have a fun talk, besides the usual dishes.

I think that bite might have worked. The small meeting room was packed with people (not only the Chinese). Late comers had to stand by the door. The subject of my talk was “How to Stay Forever Young”. Sounds funny, huh? but it was a proper subject to discuss for the festival since the story of Chang-Er reflected thousand years’ search by the Chinese people for a medicine that could keep us stay forever young. Of course, it was a tongue-in-check kind of talk, filled with both science and fictions. People responded with loud laughters. That talk naturally led us to the announcement of launching the new organization. Twenty or so people signed on site.

Were people joined on site serious about the new organization then? I doubt it. One reason for that is there were several like-minded organizations in the bay area at that time. These organiza-

tions emerged as spring bamboo but often disappeared soon after first or second meetings. But we were determined to build an organization that would become a hub for all Chinese scientists in the bay area. And, yes, we wanted to build it to stay and to grow! Several days later, we had our first EC meeting with 5 people. We elected out first President, Dr. Keting Chu, President-elect, Dr. Bao-lu Chen, Treasurer Dr. Changyu Wang. I served as the Chair of membership committee and as the liaison for our sister organizations at east coast. We also planned for an Opening Seminar later in the year. The meeting was quite successful and the rest is history.



**Front line from left to right:** *Dr. Guoliang Yu, Dr. Jingshan Hu, Dr. Yingfei Wei, Dr. Keting Chu,*

**Back line from left to right:** *Dr. Leping Li, Dr. Naibo Yang, Dr. Jun Xiang, Dr. Cheng Liu, Dr. Deqian Wang, Dr. John Wang, Dr. Baolu Chen*

Now 10 years later, the organization stands over 1700 member strong and becomes the leading organization in

its kind in the greater San Francisco bay area. It has also reached out to build up broad connections with other sister organizations in US and become a member of the Alliance of Chinese American Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Associations (ALL-CABPA) . It had 10 successful Annual Conferences and many scientific and business seminars in its record. Some of the early leaders and members have since moved on to start their own business. I just can not list enough the achievements this organization and its members have achieved in the last 10 years in this short commentary.

The success of our society is primarily and ultimately a success of community building. As Chinese, we are often prone of our collectivism as to individualism that formed foundation of western civilization. Soon after we launched our organization, Chiron decided to lay off significant number of its employees. Many of them are Chinese scientists. Shocked by the news, we decided to use the newly formed network to help those lost job to land on new jobs. Emails were sent out, CV's were forwarded and phone calls were made. In a short time, almost every one of them signed on a new job. One of my American colleagues who was also among the lay-offs told me later that he was surprised to find out all his Chinese colleagues quickly found new jobs while he was still looking. "Maybe they did not take vacation?" I said. But at bottom of my heart, for the first time I feel very proud of the young community

It might be a small incidence compared with many things happened later. But it shows what the community can do for us. However, if not because so many people put their hearts into it, there would be no such a community. In that regard, I think we should all be grateful to the volunteers, particularly to our Presidents, Board Directors, EC members and everyone who helped organizing events. There have been countless meetings at weekends, phone calls at late nights, emails at early mornings. Much of these were done while they have other family or job duty to fulfill. Community building is not a light hearted job. It is our commitment to the community and to our fellow members. It requires one's determination, dedication and perseverance that are what I had seen and had learnt from my colleagues through the decade of working together.

Any reward? Yes, but it is not going to be "scratch-n-win" or "super lotto" and it will take time, take effort and take the right attitudes for anyone to receive it and enjoy it. The reward comes as helps and advises, comes as friendship and partnership, comes as opportunities and directions. In any case, it comes as a collective win for individuals, as well as for the community. The society rewards handsomely those put their effort to build the community up and to help others.

Ten year is not a very long time but it certainly saw great changes in our personal life. Those of us who were young and restless then are now "married with kids". Those of us who had families then now see our kids grew up and went on to colleges. Scientists turned to be managers and entrepreneurs. A-students turned to be C-class leaders. For any individuals, staying young is only a dream. But, as new generations of students and scientists are joining the organization and bring in their energy and dream, this great community and great organization will be forever young!