

Remembering Andy Robertson

Chief Scientific Officer, Keystone Symposia, 2005-2011

The Board of Directors, Scientific Advisory Board and staff of Keystone Symposia are deeply saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Andrew D. Robertson, who passed away in Portland, Oregon on August 14, 2014 at age 55. Dr. Robertson – or Andy as he was known to all of us – was Keystone Symposia’s Chief Scientific Officer from 2005 to 2011.

Andy made numerous contributions including building the foundation for Keystone Symposia’s Diversity in Life Science Programs, securing an impressive amount of government grant support, and helping to forge relationships with a wide range of supportive organizations. During his nearly six-year tenure, he led the organization in many new and important scientific topic directions and programming innovations.

After leaving Keystone Symposia, Andy worked for EMBL in Heidelberg, Germany before joining the National Psoriasis Foundation in Portland as Chief Scientific and Medical Officer, a position he held until his untimely death. Previously, after receiving his Bachelor’s degree in Biology from the University of California, San Diego, Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and postdoctoral training at Stanford University School of Medicine, he had spent 13 years in research and teaching at the University of Iowa College of Medicine. He had also worked at Merck Inc. as Director of Medical Communications.

Recently, Andy proposed a new Keystone Symposia meeting topic on “Immunity in Skin Development, Homeostasis and Disease,” which was enthusiastically reviewed and endorsed by the Scientific Advisory Board at their meetings in January and June. The meeting will be organized by Drs. Frank Oliver Nestle, Richard L. Gallo, Fiona M. Watt and Paul A. Khavari and is scheduled to be held in 2016.



Dr. Juleen Zierath, Chair of the Board of Directors of Keystone Symposia, said: “Andy was a joyful soul. He had boundless energy, enthusiasm and passion for all of his engagements with Keystone Symposia. He has left a mark on all our lives. This has come far too early... Andy had so much to give.... It is a loss that is felt by many across our community... Our thoughts are with his wife Sue and his dear family.”

In addition to his well-known passion for science, Andy is fondly remembered by the staff for his genuine care and concern for his colleagues, his sensitive and insightful commitment to social justice, the resourceful mentoring he provided to students and those embarking on careers, his particularly keen sense of humor, his zest for life, and his eclectic interests ranging from skiing to music...he frequently regaled staff and board members with impromptu violin performances. He was dearly loved and he will be greatly missed.

Andy resigned from Keystone Symposia in the summer of 2011 to take a position at the EMBL (European Molecular Biology Laboratory) International Center for Advanced Training (EICAT) in Heidelberg, Germany. It was a summer of many good-byes, although he returned often to Colorado to visit.

<http://finley.tributes.com/dignitymemorial/obituary/Andrew-David-Robertson-101606487>



Andy co-launched the Keystone Symposia Fellows Program in 2008 with Dr. Laina King, Director of Keystone Symposia's Diversity in Life Science Programs. Here, he presents Dr. Alexis Stranahan with her plaque upon completion of the Program at the June 2011 Scientific Advisory Board meeting in Keystone, Colorado.



He was highly involved with SACNAS (the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science) and the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS), informing students and postdocs about new opportunities and leading career development workshops.



He always had time for students, taking great pains to listen to their stories and provide advice and encouragement.



When the volcanic eruption in Iceland ground air travel to a halt in April 2010, Andy graciously hosted Global Health Travel Award recipients who were stranded in Denver following Keystone Symposia's malaria meeting in Copper Mountain, Colorado.



With Dr. Marty Hewlett at the University of New Mexico-Taos, Andy created a popular program to engage UNM-Taos biology undergraduates in Keystone Symposia meetings taking place at the Sagebrush Inn and Conference Center in Taos.



Andy would spontaneously bring out his fiddle at staff and board gatherings, sometimes prompting a dance from younger colleagues like the daughter of Keystone Symposia Scientific Advisory Board member Dr. Karolin Luger.