

Robert A. Welch ABRF RG/Committee Member of the Year Award

Memories from Christian Lytle and Meredith Yeager

It made me very happy when I received an e-mail from Michelle Detwiler and the ABRF Executive Board, informing me of the Executive Board approval to re-name the ABRF annual award for Outstanding Research Group/Committee Member of the Year to the **Robert A. Welch Outstanding Research Group/Committee Member of the Year Award**. In 2008, Bob Welch, former chair of the Fragment Analysis Research Group (FARG), was killed in a sudden and tragic accident at his home in Martinsburg, West Virginia at only 35 years of age. When you lose a friend and /or a colleague...there is that need to do something to remember them by. Those of us who knew Bob had talked about ways to honor him, but the ideas just did not seem to come together enough to be pushed forward. I would like to thank all of you who did not let the ideas die, and who continued working hard to find a way to accomplish this goal.

Bob Welch more than deserved to have this award named after him. He was, in my opinion, destined to receive this honor at some point. He was a perfect example of the type of dedicated, energetic scientist that this award is meant to recognize. To put it plainly, Bob was a “doer” and he tended to do things on a large scale. At the same time, Bob was very inclusive and encouraging when working with others. I remember a FARG teleconference the first year Bob had joined the group – on that call, he took the time to teach us all how to use a Pivot table over the phone using the data we had collected from one of our surveys. It was time-consuming and took up most of that conference call, but the research group as a whole benefited greatly.

Bob would ask for input from anyone who was willing to put in the effort and wanted to be a part of the group. A perfect example was when Bob assumed the role of FARG Chairman at the 2008 ABRF meeting in Salt Lake City. He and a few of the FARG members were out having a few beers (Bob seem to do a lot of his free thinking with a beer in his hand) and we were discussing how to improve the FARG. Bob took the ideas from this session, and refined and organized them into an

agenda for implementation. One of his many goals was to broaden and expand upon the mission of FARG, and make it more relevant to current technologies and science – as part of this initiative, he had asked the group to consider changing the name of FARG to the Genomic Variation Research Group (GVRG) and all enthusiastically agreed. Soon after my return from Salt Lake, I received this e-mail from him.



Bob Welch
1973 - 2008

“I will be sending Michelle an email asking how to change the name / mission before we put it on the site and get her OK before I ask folks to re-apply to the GVRG. Next we'll schedule a call to discuss the mission and get the 2008-9 study rolling, begin proposals for the 2009 meeting, and discuss wrapping up the data for the 2007-8 either by manuscript or web publication.

I plan to start moving pretty quickly on this so we can be prepared for things to come.

Thanks, Bob”

That was the last e-mail I received from him...as he was killed the following day. That one simple e-mail ended up serving as the FARG (now the GVRG) agenda for the next year. It helped redefine and refocus this ABRF research group as the members of the GVRG really stepped up and took on Bob visions. Still, I cannot help wonder how much more we would have been able to accomplish in our 2009 study had Bob been there. We miss you Bob! We really do miss you.

Contributed by Christian Lytle (FARG/GVRG Chair 2007-2009)

It is both an honor and a pleasure to write a note for the ABRF newsletter announcing the ABRF award to be named in Bob Welch's remembrance, though it is also bittersweet. I knew Bob for 8 years as a coworker and good friend, which

Robert A. Welch ABRF RG/Committee Member of the Year Award, cont.

made for a lot of memories. Bob and I worked as a team, most notably to build the foundation and infrastructure for the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Core Genotyping Facility (CGF), I on the scientific and he on the laboratory side.

Day to day, Bob and I worked very closely together, had a ton of fun doing so, and often joked that we shared a brain – one that was larger than the sum of its two parts. In some ways this did seem to be true, much to the amusement (and sometimes annoyance) of those around us. We complemented each other well, and were almost always on the same page (though we did bicker like siblings) and were very often interchangeable, though there was one big exception: laboratory operations. Never before had I met someone who knew his way around the lab like Bob did. He possessed the truly exceptional, almost uncanny ability to immediately SEE things (both large and small) in protocols, processes, data, just about anything that others could not. A group of us would be belaboring over what was causing us to observe an unusual pattern in our data, and Bob would simply walk by, glance at the graph we'd produced, take a sip of coffee and say something like "that's a plate flip" and get it right on the money. Obviously, this made things like troubleshooting not only a breeze but a great learning experience.

I went to the ABRF 2007 meeting with Bob in Tampa, which I think was about the time he started to seriously lobby members of the Executive Board (and anyone else in the vicinity) for a larger genomics presence for the organization. As I remember, he was pretty relentless but was met with much

enthusiasm for his cause. After that meeting, he worked tirelessly for and truly enjoyed his experiences with all of the people that he encountered within the organization.

Bob was also one of the best friends I've ever had. We saw each other through a lot over the years – both good and bad. For those who didn't know him, I can tell you that he was hilarious, no-nonsense, enthusiastic, a daredevil, a straight shooter, loud, wicked-fun to hang out with, sarcastic, spontaneous, lighthearted, kind and fiercely loyal. While he was proud of his work and of his many, many accomplishments he was most proud of his wife and kids, their animals, and all that he had planned for their new house/farm in West Virginia.

The loss of Bob was devastating to many, including our group (and me). At first, it seemed inconceivable to go on without him but the CGF continues to thrive and grow due in large part to Bob's influence – namely because he built it that way. In some ways, Bob is still helping to run the CGF, as I find myself constantly thinking and making decisions in light of what I believe he'd expect or think or do. I still catch myself wanting to forward an email or jot him a note to let him know what's going on, to show him what an effect he had on others. I'm pretty sure that I told him this time and again, but I'll say it once more: "I'm really, really proud of you, Bob."

Contributed by Meredith Yeager, colleague at SAIC-Frederick/NCI-Frederick.

ABRF RG/Committee Member of the Year Award Honoree for 2010

*The ABRF is pleased to recognize **Michael Zianni** as the recipient of this year's **ABRF RG/Committee Member of the Year Award**.*

As the Education Committee chair of 2009 - 2010, Mike was instrumental in leading the way towards establishing a new model for pre-meeting Educational Workshops at the annual ABRF conference and was also a key participant in this year's efforts to secure an NSF grant to support the Workshops. Mike was an organizer of the 2009 Educational Workshop: "**Massively Parallel Sequencers in the Core Facility: Application & Computation**." Mike represented the ABRF, along with Caprice Rosato, at the 2009 ABRCMS conference in Phoenix, AZ. ABRCMS is the largest conference for biomedical and behavioral students, and is designed to encourage underrepresented minority students in these fields to pursue advanced degrees. In addition, Mike was awarded a Poster Judge Travel Award for this meeting. Mike has been a member of the DNA Sequencing Research Group since 2006 and is currently serving as the Chair of the DSRG.

When not dedicating amazing amounts of energy to the ABRF, Mike is the manager of the Plant-Microbe Genomics Facility at The Ohio University, married with 2 young children, is an avid spelunker and also happens to share a similar taste in music as this newsletter's Editor!



Check out this catchy video clip created by some of Mike's colleagues at OSU...I'll bet every last core facility staff member can relate!

<http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/6864163/>