



Oregon Bioscience Association

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The Rest of the Story: Oregon Bioscience Association's 2016-'17 Annual Report

ANNUAL CONFERENCE TOPS ATTENDANCE; FOCUSES ON EMERGING RESEARCHERS AND COMPANY SHOWCASE

It's impossible not to notice Jackie Wirz's enthusiasm when it comes to the diverse members of the state's bio landscape getting together for Oregon Bio's annual conference as they did at Reed College last October.

"Our community is vibrant, excited, and performing incredible work," says Wirz, assistant dean for student affairs in graduate studies at OHSU and coordinator of the conference's "Research Fast Pitch" competition. "From bacteria that can solve the plastic garbage problem to innovative treatments for Parkinson's disease, our participants were able to truly showcase their fascinating research!"

The popular Research Fast Pitch and "Company Pitch Showcase" competitions further energized last fall's already-buzzing atmosphere at the event, *Oregon Bio 2016: The Bioscience Landscape*. Considered by many of the more than 300 attendees to be the association's most impressive conference to date, the gathering featured a futurists' panel, as well as powerful presentations by Columbia Sportswear on innovations strategy and by Intel Life Sciences on the future of precision medicine.

"We look to find topics and features that the majority of our diverse members have a connection to," says Ashley Fritz, Oregon Bio's marketing manager and coordinator of the annual conference. "The keynote by Intel's Bryce Olson was about his very personal journey as a cancer patient and it delivered a very human side of bio to all our members in attendance. Also, there are a lot of things happening legislatively in Salem and DC that all companies have a stake in. Those are the kinds of common-connection topics we pursue for the annual conference."

My Fast Pitch experience was a great introduction to the world of biotech, and an invaluable experience in public speaking and networking. I am biology major at Reed College, and I presented on "plastic eating bacteria," using natural bacteria in our environment to combat plastic pollution. My experience at Fast Pitch and the positive research and investor interest I received has been incredibly valuable in continuing this project.

Fast Pitch convinced my microbiology professor to secure me lab space and materials to continue my work. I recently began my senior thesis on this topic in January, and Reed has generously provided me lab space during the summer to continue my research. My experience at Fast Pitch elevated my project from "interesting" to a commercially viable pollution solution, and I am incredibly grateful for the doors it has opened.

~Morgan Vague, Student, Reed College

October's Oregon Bio conference closed with a keynote highlighting bioscience legislation and remarks by U.S. Senator Ron Wyden.

"What's unique to biology is that everyone involved is saving and improving lives," says Fritz. "Any time Oregon Bio can act as a hub, gather members to get them thinking and talking, remind everyone of bio's collective end goal and drive Oregon bioscience forward, it's positive and constructive."

The winner of the October conference's Research Fast Pitch was Michael McNamara, PhD. – a research fellow with Providence. McNamara presented on his team's work developing software solutions that allow integration of the many data streams generated by clinical trials and external sources. The team has also developed advanced data-mining that can lead to the acceleration of research efforts and improve the odds of regulatory approval.

"I was impressed with how many amazing research projects are happening in Oregon," says Chris Edwards, assistant VP for strategic initiatives of UO and a Research Fast Pitch judge. "There is clearly a desire by talented researchers to live and work here in Oregon. The Research Fast Pitch underscores the fact that we need to create more opportunities for the bioscience industry and community to grow and thrive in Oregon."

Like the Research Fast Pitch, the Company Pitch Showcase is another high-profile competition at the annual conference that places the state's bio innovations in the spotlight. The Company Pitch Showcase allows bio startups to present before conference attendees that include investors and fellow bioscience professionals.

Jennifer Fox, the executive director of OTRADI and coordinator of the Company Pitch Showcase says the event and its competition is growing in reputation with more startups and audience members participating. She says OTRADI assists the competing startups with pitch coaching before their final presentations at the conference. From digital health devices to pharmaceutical research, Fox says she's amazed how the Company Pitch Showcase constantly reveals the tremendous breadth of innovation going on in Oregon.

"It's the premier pitch showcase annually for bio companies in the state," says Fox. "We get a good mix of investors, such as angel investors and venture capital investors in the audience. It's an extraordinary chance to showcase what your startup is doing so investors will know you, and remember you and follow up with you so you can hear their feedback."

The Company Pitch Showcase produces an overall winner as well as a winner for "audience favorite." The overall winner at October's conference was DesignMedix and CEO Sandy Shotwell. DesignMedix develops drugs to address the large medical need caused by the rapid rise in drug resistance in multiple diseases such as malaria.

Following the Company Pitch Showcase, Shotwell says DesignMedix opened a formal investment round and is now soon to close the first tranche of that investment. She says what's been happening at DesignMedix after last fall's Company Pitch Showcase underscores the competition's remarkable opportunity to get in front of investors.

"We were well-supported in the Company Pitch Showcase because we have reached an exciting milestone. Our malaria drug is ready for Phase I clinical trials," says Shotwell. "The NIH has agreed to conduct and pay for the trial, and we are preparing an IND submission."

The winner for “audience favorite” in the Company Pitch Showcase was Madorra and CEO Holly Rockweiler. She says Madorra moved to Oregon last summer, and the Company Pitch event at the conference became the perfect opportunity for her team to meet other startups and established companies in the state’s bio scene.

Madorra is developing a medical device solution for treating vaginal dryness. Madorra elicits natural, physiologic lubrication and restores vaginal health. The product is giving post-menopausal women and breast cancer survivors a new opportunity to choose the non-hormonal treatment option they want.

Rockweiler believes Madorra’s pitch was well received by the Company Pitch Showcase audience because Madorra’s innovation speaks to a real unmet need for their target patient population. She said her company’s developing of the medical device in the sexual health space is not always an easy topic to discuss, but the bio audience responds well to their presentation style.

“We like to use our presentations to open up a conversation around a traditionally taboo topic – treating the topic with respect, but adding a little humor to help, too,” says Rockweiler. “We get the giggles out first, and then say ‘let’s talk about a real problem for women and how we can really solve it!’”

Overall, Fritz said Oregon Bio’s annual conference accomplished its goal of gathering great minds from Oregon’s bio community to generate powerful discourse and new ideas. With what Wirz observed with researchers at the conference, she agrees.

“They addressed problems that have both local and worldwide impact,” Wirz says. “The scope of the research was ambitious in and of itself, but the impact our researchers are having will truly resonate with people on so many levels.

“It’s exciting to see and really gratifying to work with the researchers to help hone their message for the Research Fast Pitch format. I believe that the diversity and energy of our participants is an incredible slice of a quickly growing, eager and innovative generation of biotech in Oregon.”

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