My first President’s Page is being written as I reflect on the 2008 Annual Conference held on October 19-22 in Reno/Sparks, Nevada. As I was “handed the ABSA reins” Monday afternoon at the business meeting, it was humbling to think about the many excellent Presidents who preceded me and under whose leadership ABSA has grown to become the international organization that we are today. Thank you for your confidence and trust, and you can be sure I will be asking assistance from many of you to ensure that ABSA continues to grow solidly and steadily.

At the 51st Annual Conference, we had 28 preconference courses, with 1,843 seats occupied. There were 79 exhibitors (a new record) with 84 booths rented. The overall attendance was 724 people from 39 countries (we had representatives from 32 countries in 2007). Due to the number of high-quality abstracts submitted, we could participate in 1-1/2 days of concurrent sessions during the meeting. We should continue this format, since it maximizes the opportunity to gain new knowledge at our annual meetings. The only complaint was that we couldn’t attend each session, and that is a good problem to have. I hope that we have the same high number of quality abstracts for many years to come.

In addition, we also had the opportunity to enjoy the band and buffets at the Tuesday night Sock Hop where we were able to renew acquaintances, make new friends, and try to remember those old dances that were so much fun for so many years. Judging by the number still dancing when the band quit, the evening was a resounding success.

The Annual Conference is the culmination of efforts by many committees, as well as by the ABSA Office. The Professional Development and Conference Services Teams engage in the most activity leading up to the Annual Conference, and their efforts resulted in an excellent meeting. Our thanks to all of you and to the many others who contributed.

Currently, ABSA has 1,624 members, including 434 new members. The Mentoring Committee is available to assist new (and veteran) members in their growth within the profession. For more information, please go to the ABSA home page at www.absa.org and click on the ABSA Mentoring Process link. I encourage anyone who wants a mentor, or who wants to be a mentor, to use this process. In addition, I encourage all members to contact me or other officers to communicate your opinions regarding the issues which we on the Council are deliberating. We seek your input, and we consider your input when conducting ABSA business.

The one topic that has garnered the most interest in the past few months has been Laboratory Accreditation. In April 2008, the ABSA Council published our position paper, “Accreditation of High Containment Laboratories,” on the ABSA home page. The second paragraph of the position paper states, in part: “In light of these events and the resulting public and policy-maker concern, the American Biological Safety Association (ABSA) believes that independent accreditation of high containment laboratories in the U.S. will be more effective and less costly than government regulation, inspection, and/or permitting of laboratories. Such an oversight process would assure lab workers and the community that a biocontainment facility has in place the necessary practices, procedures, personnel, and equipment to protect people, animals, plants, and the environment and minimize the potential of lab-acquired infections and lab accidents.” The Accreditation Task Force met at the Annual Conference and will continue to meet frequently throughout the next several months. A letter from the ABSA Council, stating the reasons for, the members, and the reporting mechanism of the Task Force has been published on the ABSA home page.

We in the Biosafety Profession have much to gain by forming our own accreditation program. If we don’t set up an accreditation program and have it in place very soon, government regulations will be put in place that demand such an accrediting program, and this program may well be run by persons who do not understand biosafety or infectious disease laboratory containment. We firmly believe that a program formulated and run by Biosafety Professionals, much as other accrediting programs are run by professional boards, is very much to our advantage. The Task Force and the ABSA Council solicit your input as we develop our voluntary, self-sustaining High Containment Laboratory Accreditation Program.

In conclusion, as Biosafety Professionals, we must see that our research is conducted according to the following principle: “Failure to conduct our research safely is not an option.”