

Chris Orvig's Answers

(Vancouver in 1996, Chair of ICC 31)

1. How did your country get to bid to host the conference?

The conference had been hosted in Toronto in 1972 and there was a strong desire on the part of my senior colleagues at the University of British Columbia particularly Bill Cullen and Brian James that the conference should be held at UBC. And they put together the bid for UBC to get the conference and was accepted conditional upon a Chair being identified.

2. How did you get to be conference chair?

I was taken to lunch by said Bill Cullen and Brian James who said to me - explained to me my answer to Q1 - about the conference was going to be in Vancouver providing a Chair could be identified because Montreal which would have been the only other major city of appropriate size and stature to host the conference was also keen and my colleagues looked at me and said "Well, Vancouver will get the conference as long as we can get a Chair – Chris" and as I was pre-tenure at that time I decided that this was a vote in both my scientific and organisational abilities and accepted immediately and of course as it turned out being a Chair of a conference such as this when I was just promoted to full Professor in '95 was one of the best career moves that could have happened to me.

3. What is your recollection of the plenary speakers?

We had a excellent list of plenary speakers but my primary recollection is of Mike Fryzuk of our department introducing Dick Schrock of MIT who was the Closing Plenary and by having him as the Closing Plenary it kept many people at the conference on Friday afternoon. Mike Fryzuk introducing DS as "The World's Greatest Inorganic Chemist", a phrase for which he took immense grief in subsequent years but felt some vindication in 2005 when DS did indeed share the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for metathesis reactions.

4. What was the most outstanding scientific event of the conference?

In my estimation was the participation of younger scientists. We purposefully organised the conference with many 20 minute slots for submitted talks and we tried to pick the broadest cross-section of excellent young scientists to give lectures and many young scientists had their first ever experience of giving a 20 minute talk at an international conference at our meeting. In addition there were lots of posters at the meeting – hundreds – and we made a significant effort to make sure that these posters were displayed all week which also benefited the young people as they had several opportunities rather than just a single hour during which they could accost senior people and tell them about the great chemistry going on in their research. And finally we also had a dinner where we invited all the students that we could identify to share dinner at a beautiful location at a beautiful residence on the campus with all the invited speakers and that was an excellent event and many of the invited speakers expressed their great interest and enjoyment at having time to have dinner with the younger scientists at the conference.

5. What was the most memorable non-scientific event?

I would have to say was probably the salmon barbeque on the Friday evening at the end of the conference held at the Museum of Anthropology because of the 850 odd people at the conference we had more that 600 attend the salmon barbeque and as I previously stated this was on the last night of the conference so it was particularly memorable because it was a gorgeous evening - about 20-22 degrees - and sunny and the Museum of Anthropology features lots of native Indian artefacts including many totem poles that are ten metres high and more and the setting and the meal were spectacular and to this day eleven years later I still have attendees from the conference who see me at conferences or when I visit institutions tell me how much they enjoyed the conference and how particularly they enjoyed that salmon barbeque outside the Museum of Anthropology.