

Officer's Column

IUPAC at the Research Triangle Park, North Carolina (1997-2026)

by Mary Garson with contributions from past IUPAC Officers

The IUPAC Secretariat recently completed three decades based in the Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. The move to the USA was initiated in 1996 when the retirement of long-standing staff based at the Oxford headquarters of IUPAC created the opportunity for IUPAC to reconsider its global base. An Executive Committee meeting in Oxford in April 1996 recommended relocation to Research Triangle Park (RTP) in North Carolina, and to review the site location every ten years. Bureau minutes from later the same year reveal some concern on the part of European members that the decision had been reached with limited consultation. Nonetheless, the North American Secretariat was established in early 1997 and first housed in a demountable of modest size and appearance. All those who remember this first RTP site refer to it as the “trailer.”

John W. Jost was appointed Executive Director in April 1997 and, according to the Geneva Council records of August 1997, this was against a backdrop of intensive evaluation of IUPAC's mission and plans for restructuring of the organization! The first event held at RTP was the 125th Executive Committee meeting of April 1998. The staffing arrangements were developed as the new office became fully functional following the transition from Oxford. Linda Tapp joined the staff initially as personal administrative assistant to John Jost, and later



The IUPAC trailer (picture by Mei-Hung Chiu)

more generally as an administrative manager. Fabienne Meyers joined IUPAC in 1998 as the electronic publications manager and became Associate Director in 2009 in advance of a key role managing IUPAC's contribution to the International Year of Chemistry (2011). Fabienne relocated in Boston in 2003 and has worked remote since. Enid Weatherwax was recruited as an administrative assistant in 2005 while Tammy Bridges joined as financial controller in 2018. Successors to John Jost as Executive Director were Terry Renner, John Petersen, Lynn Soby, and Greta Heydenrych, and the current incumbent is Fabienne Meyers. Other staff who have worked at RTP at various times include Alan Senzel, Pamela Footman, Lucinda Kelly, Paul LeClair, Erin Carter, Laura Abernathy, Bryan Pearson, Jay Lucindo, and Lisa Musty.

In 2015, the Executive Director Lynn Soby arranged for the Secretariat to move into better quality office space comprising three work offices, a meeting room, a small room housing the historical collection of *Comptes Rendus* volumes and other books. The new space also housed archival material that had not been transferred



At left, the entrance to the most recent RTP office

Above: Inside entrance lobby of most recent RTP office, showing far right the portraits of the Officers



Group photo of the 54th meeting of the Executive Committee held in the Research Triangle Park Office, 31 Oct - 1 Nov 2015; from left, standing: Qi-Feng Zhou, Fabienne Meyers, Natalia Tarasova, Lynn Soby, Colin Humphris, Richard Hartshorn, Chris Brett, John Corish, Mei-Hung Chiu, Kaoru Yamanouchi; seating in the front: Kazuyuki Tatsumi, and Mark Cesa.

to the Science History Institute in Philadelphia as well as that accumulated subsequently in ongoing records and documentation.

The move to the offices in RTP coincided with a significant growth in and modernization of IUPAC's work flows and was facilitated by the rapid uptake of email correspondence and teleconferencing for communication with and between members. Around this time, John Jost set up the IUPAC website, and this original website is still accessible by following links to past Executive Committee and Bureau meetings.

At the time of moving to RTP in 1996, there were 109 officially discovered chemical elements, while now in 2026 there are 118, a fundamental and historical contribution of the joint IUPAC-IUPAP working party and the Commission on Isotopic Abundances and Atomic Weights under the Inorganic Chemistry Division (Div II). Following the establishment of the Chemistry and the Environment (Div VI) and the Chemistry and Human Health (Div VII) in 1995, there was a further expansion to eight Divisions with the establishment of Chemical Nomenclature and Structure Representation in 2002. Other highlights of the three decades at RTP included the formation of additional Standing Committees (Interdivisional Committee on Green Chemistry and Sustainable Development in 2016; Committee for Ethics, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in 2022; incorporation of the International Younger Chemists Network in 2024), or their re-establishment (Committee for Printed and Electronic Publications in 1996, later renamed as the Committee for Publications and Cheminformatic Data Standards in 2013; the Committee on Chemistry Education and the Interdivisional Committee on Terminology, Nomenclature and Symbols, both in 2002). A Fellows program was established in 1998, as were a series of prizes, including the Solvay awards (2001), the Distinguished Women

in Chemistry/Chemical Engineering awards (2011) and the IUPAC-Soong prize (2025). There were high profile contributions to several UN-badged International Years (Chemistry 2011; Periodic Table 2019; Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development 2022-2023). In 2019 there was also the celebration of IUPAC's own centenary and with the establishment of the Top Ten Technologies and the Global Women Breakfast. The scientific work of IUPAC is handled through a project system which replaced the earlier Commission system from 2000 onwards, and through numerous symposia, workshops, and more recently webinars. Since 2001, the biennial scientific congress has been run alongside the General Assembly as the World Chemistry Congress. After 2000, *Chemistry International* and *Pure and Applied Chemistry* were produced "in house" until 2013 when IUPAC signed with De Gruyter. A third journal *Chemistry Teacher International* was added in 2019.



The Officers in the lawn of the RTP Office during their visit on 3 Dec 2005: (from left) Kazuko Matsumoto, Christoph Buxtorf (Treasurer), David St. Black (Secretary General), Leiv Sydnes (Past President), and Bryan Henry (President)



John Jost, Linda Tapp, Jung-Il Jin, and Enid Weatherwax (2008)



Mary Garson, Gaby Brooks (TheeDesign), Lynn Soby, and Laura McConnell (2018 while prepping for IUPAC100)– image provided by Laura McConnell

As office work became increasingly online, and notably post the COVID pandemic of 2020, this led to staff often working remotely. Around the same time, it was recognized that the office facilities which had been rent-free for the first ten years at RTP had become a financial impost on IUPAC's budget. It was time to consider moving!

One of the first decisions made by the newly-established Executive Board in 2024 was to reopen discussions about the location of the Secretariat and to solicit hosting arrangements from member NAOs. Following a global call for proposals, the 2025 Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur confirmed an Executive Board decision to enter into formal contract negotiations with Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Rome, Italy and the University and City of Malaga, Spain to establish a European based Secretariat for the Union.

IUPAC signed MOUs with both Malaga (December 2025) and CNR (February 2026), and the complex process of transferring office functions to these two locations is currently underway under the direction of Fabienne Meyers and assisted by Liana Vaccari as the project manager.

Financial operations will be located in IUPAC Malaga Office with the IUPAC Rome Office looking

after international affairs, projects, communication and digital matters.

Reflections on RTP

Looking back over three decades of the IUPAC Secretariat at Research Triangle Park, we recognize not only the institution itself but also the people whose dedication has made it an essential pillar of IUPAC's success and global impact. IUPAC expresses its sincere gratitude to the staff who have served there over the years. Their dedication and professionalism have provided the continuity and support that have enabled IUPAC to fulfil its global mission and advance chemistry worldwide.

Chemistry International reached out to some past members of the IUPAC Executive, in particular those who visited RTP and asked them for their recollections of the RTP office(s). There were a few comments about the physical environment, but mostly there were many warm-hearted comments about staff with whom our volunteers connected. A selection of the comments received follow.

Leiv Sydnes (President 2004-2005): "John Jost, David Black, Ted Becker and I used e-mail a lot, and I called pretty regularly to John and Ted. For me, the trailer is associated with using months and not seasons in all IUPAC contexts. I had the habit of talking about seasons even when I chaired meetings, and at Executive Committee meetings in the trailer, David corrected me every time I said for instance spring instead of March."

Bryan Henry (President 2006-2007): "I always looked forward to meetings at RTP. They were most productive and always handled efficiently. The best part was the chance to meet and interact with so many interesting and stimulating people."

David StC Black (Secretary-General (2004-2011): "Although the RTP building was an effective office space, it always struck me as a very lonely place. For that reason, during my time as Secretary-General (2004-2011), I was always keen to schedule suitable meetings there. The RTP staff of John Jost, Linda Tapp, Enid Weatherwax and the late Paul LeClair could not have been more helpful and the atmosphere was always warm despite the bleak location."

Mark Cesa (President 2014-2015): "I spent quite a bit of time in the "double-width" trailer that was IUPAC's home in RTP during my time as an officer, and recall that there was a big black snake living underneath it. As

Reflections on RTP

chair of COCI, we held an off-year annual meeting in RTP at the old office. After that meeting, COCI also went as a group to a minor-league baseball game in Durham, NC; one game of which was rained out after three innings. Akira Ishitani from Japan enjoyed the baseball especially. At other meetings at RTP I was usually the driver—I'd rent a car at the RDU airport and transport the officers to and from the office. We held our main meeting to develop the 2015 IUPAC Strategic Plan at RTP as well. Lynn Soby made it her task to get IUPAC out of the trailer and into some proper office space. The driving factor was an increase in rent for the trailer. At first the office space she found for IUPAC worked well, but after a while it became more than was needed."

Laura McConnell (Div VI President 2012–2015: As a dedicated IUPAC volunteer for many years, I was fortunate to be just a short drive from the IUPAC Secretariat in Research Triangle Park, and I gladly took advantage of that opportunity.

On every visit, I was warmly welcomed by the IUPAC staff, Enid, Linda, Tammy and Fabienne, and I was included in lunches and dinners when officers came to town. I will truly miss having IUPAC in my backyard, but I am pleased to see the Union embrace a new future filled with new possibilities.

Chris Brett (President 2020–2021): "I first went to RTP when Sean Corish was still treasurer and Colin Humphris was acting Secretary General. The meeting was in the hotel and we visited the trailer, by then empty. I went to RTP another couple of times when we were in the new premises but my last was in 2019. A planned visit for 2020 was cancelled, of course.

I remember from my last visit (to the "new" premises) the unexpected arrival of a very large and bulky carpet, weighing around 70 kg and depicting the full periodic table. It had been made by some young schoolchildren, I believe in Pakistan or Bangladesh. Their teacher decided to gift it to IUPAC and sent it without asking first, transport costs to be paid by IUPAC. I don't know what happened to the carpet."

Richard Hartshorn (Secretary General 2015–2023): "I visited the Secretariat numerous times during my terms as Secretary General and particularly enjoyed the American-style lemonade and the light-hearted competition with Linda for any available chocolate..."

Javier Garcia-Martinez (President 2022–2023): "What I remember most was the people behind the



Lynn Soby, Javier Garcia Martinez, Tammy Bridges, and Enid Weatherwax (2022)—supplied by Javier Garcia Martinez

Secretariat. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to get to know them better, learn about their daily work, and discover the many ways in which they contribute to IUPAC's mission. Much of this work takes place behind the scenes and often goes unnoticed, yet it is essential to the Union's success. A particularly memorable moment was signing the visitor book. As I turned its pages and saw the names of many distinguished scientists and leaders who had come before me, I was reminded that while IUPAC's presidents, officers, and volunteers change over time, the Secretariat provides the continuity that enables the Union to thrive across generations."

Zoltan Mester (Secretary General 2024–): "I have visited the US offices several times since I took office in 2024. In the postpandemic era, IUPAC's backoffice support functions have become truly remote and global. Working closely with Enid, Tammy, and Fabienne—and more recently Liana—it has become clear that our core lies less and less in a physical location, and more in the strength and connection of our people. Although we will close our physical offices in North Carolina, on 30 June 2026, the central functions of IUPAC remain intact. Thank you Enid and Tammy for your service. We now look forward to the next chapter in Italy and Spain."

Mary Garson (President 2026–2027): "These reflections beautifully evoke the warm and dynamic relationship between the Secretariat staff and volunteers these past thirty years. The growth in operations and in scientific activity while based in North Carolina is testament to the contributions of many dedicated office staff. The next chapter in IUPAC's history now begins in Europe, and we look forward to a productive future ably assisted by a new generation of Secretariat staff together with our wonderful volunteers from around the world." 