

A Stem Grows In Ocean Reef



by Jim Leenhouts

With a sincere apology to novelist Betty Smith for corrupting both the title of her wonderful book and her metaphor of a tree surviving in a surprising environment, this report's title is apt. Even more apt, the word "Stem" has two meanings – it is, of course, a fundamental element of a growing plant and "STEM" is also the recent acronym for the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

Last Friday, Dr. Thomas Connelly, the Executive Director of the American Chemical Society (ACS), the world's largest technical society of 160,000 members with deep, over-lapping



Pictured (L-R) Larry Brady, Mary Bet Dobson (ACS), Graham Brown (Academy@OR), Jim Leenhouts, Thomas Connelly (ACS) Kristen Baar (Academy@OR), Nelson Sims, Ronald Cresswell, Yurianna Mikolay (ORCF) Not pictured: Steven Clark.

contacts with scientists across the world visited Ocean Reef. True, I have been a member of his society for sixty years and had he summoned me to Washington, I would have responded.

That I find myself, along with the ACS, in the perfect storm of deep national concern over waning, youthful interest in STEM careers, sharply negative attitudes involving chemicals and pharmaceuticals, faux science

and academic responsibility was not my original intention. That the ACS visit happened at Ocean Reef is due to my simple degree in chemistry, a modest scholarship through the ACS and my desire to help youngsters gain some depth in Science that is mandatory today no matter the career. I do this latter by cooperating with a talented science teacher at the Academy to perform experiments to visualize the content. Mary Bet Dobson, an attentive ACS employee who has followed my scholarship interests at Ocean Reef, spawned the ACS director's visit.

Honored and impressed by any executive who would seek answers on important matters by direct observation, I arranged a round table discussion that could only happen, I believe, at Ocean Reef where corporate leaders abound, a successful small K – 8th grade school prepares its students for high school achievement and a strong, overarching drive for

community and area charitable giving and deeds exists.

Members **Larry Brady, Nelson Sims, Ronald Cresswell** and **Steven Clark**, all possessing remarkably successful STEM careers in chemical and pharmaceutical industries, joined Yurianna Mikolay, Executive Director of the **Ocean Reef Community Foundation**, Head Master Graham Brown and Lead Science Teacher Kristen Baar of the Academy at Ocean Reef met with Dr. Connelly to discuss both the problems facing American STEM research, industries and education and to seek potential solutions. At stake is the nature of Dr. Connelly's own society and ultimately a large portion of human progress that cannot exist without new chemicals and pharmaceuticals created by STEM oriented chemists and engineers to replace the less than perfect products we now use. (Ronald Cresswell, a panel member, points out, "We once gave the Nobel Prize to the discoverer of DDT!")

The meeting meandered from money, to other good ideas to politicians and untrained regulators. But one simple stem sprouted triumphant among the Ocean Reef panelists – the relationship that develops between the qualified Science Instructor and the student of early age. Perhaps the maturation of this one-on-one concept will emerge, if merited, broadly, perhaps locally, perhaps nationally.

The next step – building a roster of members interested in discussing STEM for kids. Email bigdaddy@terranova.net.

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