

A perspective on CNTA's Education Initiatives

CNTA's primary mission has been and will remain education. When CNTA was founded, the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents were relatively recent memories. Additionally, the Cold War had ended and the Department of Energy was allowed to be more forthcoming about the missions at SRS; for the first time, the community was learning about the nuclear materials and missions at the Site. Both of these incidents served to promote anti-nuclear sentiments in our community, state and country.

Over the history of the organization, different education initiatives were created to address areas needing an immediate information infusion: the use of nuclear energy to produce electricity and education of the public about the missions at SRS.

Those initiatives are outlined below:

Speakers' Bureau

Upon CNTA's creation, it became quickly obvious that a public outreach program that offered knowledgeable speakers to address concerns and misinformation in public forums was needed. The "Speakers' Bureau" was created and it remains a cornerstone of the CNTA education outreach initiatives. This group provides easily accessible information and a resource of knowledgeable speakers on many nuclear topics to the general community. They present and discuss issues at local group meetings ranging from a Chamber of Commerce to church and social groups.

Essay Contest

The CNTA Essay Contest was introduced in 2006, and became the first in a series of initiatives aimed to interest students in nuclear technologies and associated career paths. Each year, regional high school juniors and seniors (including home-schooled students) are eligible to submit an essay entry on a list of pre-selected topics. Winners receive \$1,000 and their school receives \$500 for science oriented field trips or materials. Since the contest's inception, we have awarded \$52,500 to the student winners and their schools across the CSRA.

Education Committee

In 2008, CNTA recognized that the school curricula in South Carolina and Georgia did not include much information about nuclear science and its applications. To try to influence positive change, CNTA formed an Education Committee to "educate more young people about energy issues, particularly with respect to nuclear technologies, with the ultimate goals of enabling more career choices and creating positive attitudes about nuclear power."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Participants of the 2015 Southeastern Summer Nuclear Institute at Plant Vogtle

Bringing Nuclear Into the Classroom

In about the same timeframe, through the Nuclear Workforce Initiative lead by Savannah River Site Community Reuse Organization, the region began to recognize that it would greatly benefit from a "grow your own" approach to fill the jobs in the regional nuclear industries.

It was decided that the best approach to enhancing awareness of nuclear science and its opportunities was to offer a seminar for middle and high school teachers. "Bringing Nuclear into the Classroom" was first presented in March 2010, with a full enrollment of 25 attendees. This one-day seminar continues to be offered annually with the help of many volunteers, sponsors and partners, including the USC Aiken Ruth Patrick Science Center (RPSEC), the American Nuclear Society and several corporate donors. The seminar closes with a summary of the regional nuclear businesses, the career opportunities these offer, and a projection of upcoming needs in each job category. The program has reached more than 350 teachers and counselors in Georgia and South Carolina. To further aid teachers, volunteers have developed science kits that reside at the RPSEC and can be taken out on loan by teachers.

Southeastern Summer Nuclear Institute (SSNI)

A further evolution of the teacher seminar concept came in 2015 with the development of the two-day SSNI, which expanded the

classroom opportunity by adding tours of Plant Vogtle and SRS. This program generated so much enthusiasm that it was expanded to three days in 2016, with the inclusion of a tour on nuclear technology in medicine at Augusta University. It is developed and organized by volunteers and the cost is covered by corporate and non-profit organization sponsors.

Robert Maher Memorial Scholarship

In concert with promoting student excellence in science and engineering fields related to nuclear enterprise, CNTA administers the competition for the annual Robert Maher Memorial Scholarship. This corporately sponsored, \$5,000 prize is awarded to a college junior or senior with a meritorious academic record. Candidate applications are solicited from all eligible colleges and universities within South Carolina and Georgia. Applicants must be majoring in a nuclear science field or one that is linked to nuclear science. To date, scholarships totaling \$70,000 have been awarded.

CNTA Video Contest

The most recent initiative, the Video Contest, is being launched this year. This new competition will be formally announced during Nuclear Science Week (Oct. 17-21). Each team of students will develop a video that is a "Nuclear Myth Buster." Schools may submit more than one entry and there will be several winners, with each award going directly to

the team's school.

CNTA also helps to educate the public through factual public testimony at regional hearings as well as by writing editorials and articles for local and regional publications. Often focused on a topic of national importance, some of these pieces have been published by national newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times

In the realm of nuclear energy, we are fortunate to have moved forward nationally, with the southeastern region now leading the "nuclear renaissance." Two new second generation plants are under construction at Plant Vogtle in Burke County, GA and two more at V.C. Summer near Columbia, S.C. The CSRA is also host to centers of excellence in nuclear medicine at Augusta University; nuclear materials processing and storage at SRS; and Savannah River National Laboratory, a premier nuclear research institute. Despite our region's indisputable leadership in the area of nuclear science and technology, however, the necessity of thoughtful communication with and education of the public is as great today as it ever was and has become more multifaceted. To answer this call, CNTA will continue to grow and nurture its education outreach program. We are committed to ensuring a clean, bright, safe nuclear future for us all.

Susan Wood, Ph.D.
Past Board Chair, CNTA
and current Board member