Celebrating Gail  

Karen Rane, UMD Plant Diagnostic Laboratory, University of Maryland and Tom Creswell, Plant and Pest Diagnostic Laboratory, Purdue University

Gail Ruhl, senior diagnostician in the Purdue Plant and Pest Diagnostic Laboratory (PPDL), is retiring on April 30, 2019. Gail’s plant diagnostic career began in 1979 as the founding director and sole diagnostician of Purdue’s newly formed Plant Disease and Weed Identification Clinic. Following the creation of Purdue’s integrated PPDL in 1990, her primary responsibility shifted to plant problem diagnosis. Gail helped network diagnosticians long before there was an NPDN by organizing diagnosticians to meet at APS national meetings, by helping launch the APS Diagnostics Committee and by serving as managing editor of Plant Diagnostics Quarterly, a print newsletter sponsored by the APS Diagnostics Committee. PDQ published new disease fact sheets, information on diagnostic techniques and notes about new disease occurrences; helping diagnosticians stay current and connected for many years in the pre-Internet era. In addition, Gail has been a force in educating others in plant diagnostics—she conducted plant diagnostics training for Master Gardeners, Certified Crop Advisers, and commercial pesticide applicators throughout her career, and has generously shared her presentations and outreach materials with many who conduct similar training activities.

Gail has been actively involved in NPDN from its beginning—she provided input on clinic data collection and function of clinic databases as new multi-state sample data management systems were being devised. She also consulted with staff at CERIS on the development of the NPDN National Repository. She has been an active member of both the NPDN Diagnostics and Training and Education Committees and has developed or co-developed numerous outreach materials for NPDN First Detector training and diagnosticians. Gail also served for several years as the editor of Diagnostic Tips section of the NPDN newsletter, a modern continuation of PDQ.

Gail has worked closely with state and national regulators on plant disease topics—she was involved in the response to the 2003 Ralstonia solanacearum R3B2 outbreak in 2003, and Phytophthora ramorum trace forward sample testing. In 2015 she was the first in the nation to diagnose Corn Tar Spot, caused by Phyllachora maydis, and quickly informed regulators, regional extension specialists and key national USDA partners. Her depth of knowledge, diligence and integrity have earned her the trust and support of both regulatory personnel and extension specialists.

In recognition of her national reputation in plant diagnostics, Gail was invited to give a presentation entitled “A year in the life of a diagnostician” at the 2010 APS Annual Meeting and in 2012 she was honored with the APS Excellence in Extension Award. Gail’s contributions to plant diagnostics and the NPDN have had a major impact on plant diagnostics as a profession, and the NPDN as a network. We will miss her, and wish her all the best in her retirement! 🌿
The sixth NPDN laboratory earns STAR-D laboratory accreditation

Dawn Dailey O’Brien and Karen Snover-Clift, NEPDN, Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology Section, Cornell University

We are very pleased to announce that the sixth NPDN laboratory, Iowa State University Plant and Insect Diagnostic Center (ISU-PIDC), has received STAR-D laboratory accreditation! Our congratulations go to all the members of this laboratory who have worked so diligently to earn this designation, especially Ed Zaworski, diagnostician and quality manager, and Laura Jesse Isles, laboratory director and insect diagnostician. This accreditation is the result of many hours of their hard work and is an opportunity for continual quality improvement of plant diagnostic services to their customers. Laura explained, “The external audit process helps us to improve by identifying something in our quality management system that we may not have addressed well.”

The System for Timely, Accurate and Reliable Diagnostics, known as STAR-D, is the National Plant Diagnostic Network’s (NPDN) laboratory accreditation program. STAR-D provides a framework for a plant diagnostic laboratory to implement a quality management system in their day to day operations in order to foster accurate, reliable, consistent and repeatable diagnostic results. Accreditation to STAR-D is a voluntary process through which a plant diagnostic laboratory’s quality management system is periodically reviewed in detail to ensure that a laboratory has met essential requirements and standards of quality for laboratory management, facilities, equipment, and trained personnel.

Their dedication to the STAR-D program is apparent. Laura is a trained STAR-D external auditor, Ed attended the QMS workshop in January 2015 and a STAR-D Phase 2 training in September 2015. In addition, Lina Rodriguez-Salamanca, their other disease diagnostician, attended the newly created- STAR-D based, Introduction to Quality Management workshop in November 2018.

The audit team consisted of Shouhua Wang of the Nevada Department of Agriculture (lead auditor), Raj Singh of Louisiana State University, and Virginia Tarango of Oregon Department of Agriculture. The ISU-PIDC staff hosted the external auditors for two days of intensive review of their procedures and materials. The audit team spent most of their time with Ed and Laura but also interviewed other laboratory staff. The auditors reported, “It is evident staff are discussing regularly how to improve and make their system more effective for all.”

The NPDN STAR-D board met to review the extensive, very detailed, external audit report and based on that information provided, granted STAR-D accreditation to the ISU-PIDC as of April 1, 2019. The term of accreditation is for a five year period with required written annual updates.

As we always say, we couldn’t have a viable STAR-D system without the STAR-D external auditors who play a critical role in the success of the STAR-D program. The audit team members dedicate a lot of time to ensure they conduct a very complete and comprehensive external audit. The STAR-D board members recognized this too and requested we convey their thanks to the audit team for providing the board with everything they needed to make this decision. We would like to thank ALL of the STAR-D external auditors for their dedication and commitment ensuring that STAR-D is a quality program!

Future STAR-D training opportunities are being planned! Trainings will be advertised in the NPDN News, on NPDN’s website, and through postings to the regional listservs. If you haven’t, please consider attending (or sending someone to) a future training workshop and learning more about how STAR-D can benefit your laboratory.

Congratulations again to the Iowa State University Plant and Insect Diagnostic Center! 🌟
The Sentinel Plant Network is hosting two workshops for public garden professionals this spring and summer.

If you are a diagnostician and are interested to assist with one of these programs, contact Rachel McCarthy at rachel.mccarthy@cornell.edu.

**Upcoming workshops**

**Upper midwest**
Green Bay Botanical Garden
Green Bay, WI
May 23 & 24, 2019

**Great Plains**
Cheyenne Botanic Gardens
Cheyenne, WY
July 17 & 18, 2019
Upcoming events

April 15–20, 2019
2019 NPDN National Meeting
Indianapolis, Indiana

May 21–23, 2019
2019 Mid-Atlantic Bark Beetle Identification Workshop
Blacksburg, VA

August 3–7, 2019
2019 APS Annual Meeting
Cleveland, Ohio

contribute

Share tips and news with your colleagues
Recently write an article for a trade journal? Do you have a tip, announcement, job listing or network update you would like to include in the NPDN News? Email Rachel McCarthy at rachel.mccarthy@cornell.edu.

connect

NPDN outreach. Connect with us on social media!

photo of the month

Rhabdocline needlecast (Rhabdocline weirii) on Douglas fir. The fruiting bodies rupture the needle epidermis in spring exposing the spore bearing areas.
photo by Dawn Dailey O'Brien, Cornell University, Bugwood.org