

Samuel Danishefsky Wins Inaugural Creativity Award

“We stand on the threshold of a new beginning if you will, as we celebrate the accomplishments of one of the true giants in the field of chemistry, medicine, and science in general,” noted Dr. Michael M. Miller of Bristol-Myers Squibb Co. (Chair of the Organic Topical Group of the North Jersey Section of the American Chemical Society). This past September 20th Dr. Miller, his team of co-organizers, and Dr. Catherine T. Hunt of Rohm and Haas Co. (President-elect of the National ACS) were joined by over 250 participants to help honor a lifetime of achievements from one of the leaders in the field of organic chemistry, Professor Samuel J. Danishefsky. Professor Danishefsky, a chemistry professor at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and Columbia University, was selected as the Inaugural 2006 Award recipient of “The Award for Creativity in Molecular Design and Synthesis.”

The purpose of the Award is to celebrate the scientific, technical, and industrial impact of senior members of the American Chemical Society and their mentorship of younger members. The Award is given in recognition of accomplishment in pure or applied chemistry, as characterized by the initiative, creativeness, leadership, and perseverance of the individual as indicated by published or unpublished evidence. “Accomplishment” for the purpose of this Award is understood to be that of a world renowned leader of unusual merit, with an emphasis on an individual who has demonstrated broad scoping impact in the areas of chemical synthesis, method development, bio-organic/medicinal chemistry, pharmaceutical sciences, and/or molecular recognition.

Unlike the various other Awards which are bestowed upon members each year by singular organizations, “The Award for Creativity in Molecular Design and Synthesis” is unique in that it has been established by the North Jersey Section of the ACS and a combined consortium of organizations from the pharmaceutical sector and academic arena. The founding sponsors of this Award include: Bristol-Myers Squibb, Hoffmann-La Roche, Merck, Novartis, Schering-Plough, and Rutgers University.

Throughout the afternoon of the Award Symposium, attendees enjoyed five excellent talks from a series of former Danishefsky alumni which spanned the gamut from natural product synthesis and chemical methodology to the impact of chemical biology and focused drug discovery programs. Selected speakers included: Professor Erik Sorensen (Princeton University), Professor Dalibor Sames (Columbia University), Professor Matthew Shair (Harvard University), Dr. David Myles (Epiphany Biosciences), and Dr. Roger Ruggieri (Pfizer). Danishefsky’s breath of impact was not only highlighted through the oral presentations, but was further displayed by a poster session in his honor. Each poster was contributed by a member of the Danishefsky academic family – whether this be an academic child, grand child, or in some cases a great grand child. After a banquet dinner, Dr. Miller and Dr. Hunt presented “The Award for Creativity in Molecular Design and Synthesis,” which consisted of a crystal plaque and a cash prize, to Professor Samuel Danishefsky. The evening was concluded by a final lecture on provocative problems in total synthesis by Professor Danishefsky where he described no less than seven landmark synthetic endeavors that spanned his career.

When Professor Danishefsky was asked about the Award, he admitted that he “was truly delighted to be the inaugural recipient of the Award for Creativity in Molecular Design & Synthesis,” and added, “Sarah and I ... shall cherish it [the Award ceremony] for the rest of our days.”