

AMCA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

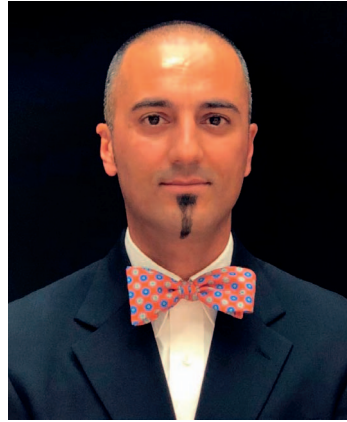
ARY FARAJI

Salt Lake City Mosquito Abatement District, Salt Lake City, UT

Well, what a long, strange trip it has been! All of us in public health expected a pandemic of sorts sooner or later, but I guess our focus was a bit biased towards a vector-borne pandemic and not a respiratory virus. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a contagious severe acute respiratory syndrome pathogen, completely turned our lives and association upside down. We lost friends, family, colleagues, and loved ones, but as life always does, we found a way and will continue to find our way in this postpandemic world. We became experts in teleconferences and remote work and once again, with trying to do more with less. I was no exemption as your association president, and although I had many goals and aspirations when I took over the presidency, I had to regroup and reconsider what was realistic and what was too optimistic. Yes, the challenges were unique, but we are used to that in our profession, are we not? But these recent challenges really needed a united front from all of us. A true solidarity like no other. It was up to us, all of us. This was when we put the larvae and pupae to bed and went looking for the adults. This was when the administrators put down their pens and picked up dippers. We lived and breathed vector control. Because these were strange times indeed.

Now, strange or not, I've always liked the unknown. I like the uncertainty of life. The changes. The evolution. In fact, that is why I love what we do, and once I put my foot in the pond, I jump in wholeheartedly. I like the fact that there are no two days that are similar in our profession. No two seasons. Not even two decades. Everything is constantly evolving in our profession, and we often adapt and respond the best that we can.

This pandemic surrounding COVID-19 was no different. It was just another challenge that we had to face, and a challenge that we not only met, but rose above. As public health stewards, we did our part and we didn't allow one public health situation to lead to another. I urge you to continue to do what you can to do your part. Many of our districts and partners donated extra supplies to medical personnel and first responders during the pandemic. Many made changes internally to limit personnel and public contact; increased sanitation measures of all facilities and equipment; initiated changes for start times, works hours, or even works days; but above all, mosquito control districts adapted to continue providing the essential service that we provide. I hope that all of you continue in your mission to enhance the quality of life and protect public health, no matter what pandemic we are faced with in the future.



The AMCA also created a section on the opening page of our website (www.mosquito.org) where members and the general public could find more information on COVID-19. In addition to regular email updates for our members, we updated this site frequently and tried to assist many of you that were dealing with the same topics of discussion and inquiry which were constantly arising. I urge our members to continue to check the site regularly for useful information, such as official statements about vector control being an essential service.

Yes, we are an essential service, and this fact was prophetic in the decision of the AMCA Board of Directors (BOD) to cancel our organization's annual meeting scheduled on March 16–20, 2020, in Portland, OR. That decision was made in early March, just weeks before the meeting, and days before any federal or state declarations. It was a tough decision, not just because of all the hard work and planning/logistic arrangements that had been made (we were on track to beat previous AMCA numbers set in Seattle during 2014), but also because of the financial costs associated with such cancellations (not just in terms of loss, but also in revenues which sustain our association). The financial losses at the time were estimated close to half a million dollars, which as you can imagine, could not be taken lightly. However, after multiple deliberations and input from state and federal partners, the BOD felt that as public health professionals, we are dedicated to advancing the welfare of the public by preventing and minimizing the risk of pathogens, and that it should be in the best interest of our members, partners, and the general public to cancel our annual meeting. I would like to take a moment and thank the BOD for making such a difficult decision, and to also thank our membership

and partners in support of this decision. I know it was not popular amongst many of you, but I hope that you have realized that this really was intended for the benefit of all of us. This was unprecedented in the history of our organization, not even a world war was enough to curtail our meetings during the 1940s, but then again, this pandemic was also unprecedented.

I know that 2020–21 was not an opportune time to take over the presidency of our association, but remember that no two years are alike! So, we must do what we can with what we have. But before I start with the goals and accomplishments during my presidency, please allow me to thank a few individuals and partners. I would like to thank the BOD for their perseverance and hard work not only during 2020–21, but also the preceding year leading up to the pandemic. In particular, Jason Kinley, as our past president of the AMCA, deserves much credit. Jason took the reins after a major change in our management company (another tough decision that we had to make to part ways with Association Headquarters and hire the Advocacy and Management Group [AMG]), which was not easy even under normal conditions. But he did it with class and he did it with a smile (OK, maybe it's a scowl, but he swears that is actually a smile), and I am proud to not only call him a colleague, but also a friend. I also owe gratitude to Mark Breidenbaugh; I thank the late William (Bill) Walton for his excellent previous leadership and sage counsel; Gary Hatch for counting the beans, not missing any money (although missing a mustache now), and admirable guidance for a new management company during the transition; to Gary Goodman for always being a really good man and keeping everyone in line; Herff Jones for his uncanny ability to cite Robert's Rules of Order, work with the Bylaws and Membership Committee, and bring us back on track; to Chris Lesser for keeping us all afloat and stirring up the ocean just to test the waters; to Mark Clifton for bringing a new perspective to the Board, assiduous work on ESA/Pollinators Subcommittee, and just being an all-around fun guy; and to Lee Cohnstaedt for constant intelligence, astute input, and pragmatic approach in all Board-related matters. I thank all of you, and others that I may have missed, for your service and look forward to working with you in the future.

I also want to take a moment to thank all the individuals that make the AMCA what it is, particularly those committee and subcommittee chairs and prominent members that really help turn our rotary nozzles. In particular, I thank Angela Beehler, who works around the clock to ensure our legislative and regulatory issues are addressed. Working closely with her are multiple subcommittee chairs and members, which are too many to name here, but I would like to thank the efforts of Michael Riles, Nina Dacko, Gary Goodman, Gabrielle Sakolsky, Bill Meredith, and Joel Buettner. I would like to thank Janet McAllister for her work on the Bylaws and Policy Committee; Isik Unlu on Training

and Membership; Kristy Burkhalter on Young Professionals; and last but certainly not least, Seth Britch on Science and Technology and Craig Stoops on the Mosquito Research Foundation Subcommittee. I would also like to thank my mentors, colleagues, and friends who continue to provide exceptional advice and input during these difficult times: these include Roxanne Connelly, Randy Gaugler, Lyell Clarke, Peter Connelly, Bob Peterson, Chris Stelzig, Rajeev Vaidyanathan, Mark Latham, Sam Dickson, and Kristen Healy. I also want to take a moment and acknowledge the untimely loss of Bill Walton and Dan Strickman during last year, two dear friends, mentors, and colleagues that meant a lot to me and touched all of our lives for the better. I also apologize to those that I may have missed.

Now, as far as some goals and accomplishments, please allow me to start the discussions with the difficult decision to hire a new management company for our association. This was another problematic decision for the BOD, but one that was necessary for the association. And similar to other difficult decisions that take time to acclimate and fall into place, we unfortunately had to make a change in the Executive Director role for our association during 2020–21. However, I am ecstatic to report that this change has been fantastic for the association and we are now in the caring hands of Megan MacNee, who is serving as AMCA's Executive Director and is assisted by Natalie Perry as the Meetings/Events Coordinator. These two ladies genuinely have the best interest of the association in mind and we wholeheartedly welcome them and the AMG aboard.

With the pending retirement of our noble and long-standing Technical Advisor (TA), Joe Conlon, we also had to make a difficult decision in selecting a new TA for the association. After a scrutinous selection process, which was also quite difficult given the caliber of individuals that had applied for the position, the BOD selected Dave Brown as the new TA. I was delighted to introduce Mr. Brown to the membership. As a past president of the AMCA, Chair of the Legislative and Regulatory Committee, and previous Manager of the Sac-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District, I had no doubts that Mr. Brown would excel in this position. I enthusiastically welcome Dave and bid Joe a happy retirement and hope to benefit from his wit for many years to come. Joe taught me that every day is a holiday, every meal a feast, and every paycheck a small fortune.

And now, please allow me to share with you some of the plans and initiatives that I wanted to tackle during 2020–21. Many of these initiatives may be multiyear projects, but nonetheless, the first briquette must be tossed at some point. And bear in mind that these will be member driven and voted on by the membership at some point, but my main intention was to start the dialogue and get you all thinking. Get you thinking about where we have been, where we want to go, and what we want to accomplish in the future? I did not undertake this presidency for the

mere fact of doing it. I wanted to make some changes. I wanted to leave it better than the way that I found it. And I know that change is difficult, but if you don't talk about it and address it, nothing will get done. And I do realize that this may not have been the best year to undertake any of these initiatives, but we needed to start somewhere.

The big initiative that I wanted to undertake during my presidency was a strategic planning event for the AMCA. I sincerely believed that it was time for us to really take a look at ourselves and determine the next 50 years for AMCA. I wanted to incorporate an appreciative inquiry method and really allow the membership to provide input into this. This truly needed to be a community effort, and not dictated by a president or a BOD. However, there were certain topics of conversation that I profoundly wanted to present to the membership to start the discussions. These included growing our membership numbers; rebranding to update the mission and logos of the association; consideration of a name change, such as the American Mosquito and Vector Control Association; adoption of a Diversity and Inclusivity Committee; future direction of our training and membership education; growth and determination of the future of our scientific journal; hiring of new subject editors for the journal; strengthening our relationship and partnerships with other organizations (ESA, SOVE, NACCHO, NPMA, NEHA, ASTHO, CSTE. . .); growing the Mosquito Research Foundation into a more sustainable branch of our association; increasing our global reach; expansion of our partnerships and collaborations with federal partners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], EPA, FAA. . .); growth of our legislative and advocacy; and further development with our industry partners. Yes, I know these were all big tasks, but we must start somewhere, so why not here?

Strategic planning and membership survey. By now, you are well aware that we were forced to table our Strategic Planning until this pandemic subsides. However, many of you are aware and have responded to a qualitative Membership Survey that was circulated amongst you. Those results were tabulated and incorporated into a much more detailed survey that was sent out to the membership shortly thereafter. We had an excellent response rate to the surveys and are hopeful that these findings will be used by future presidents to finally conduct a bottom-up approach for a strategic planning. Remember that this is really for you and it is a great opportunity to let your leadership know what we are doing right, what we are not doing, and where we need improvement. The full report (<https://files.constantcontact.com/1f433099001/120a7b88-09c2-4b47-9937-5743950463eb.pdf>) and the summary (<https://files.constantcontact.com/1f433099001/e5767647-fa18-4582-b0e5-9cea57913f20.pdf>) can both be found on the AMCA website, and I encourage all of you to peruse these reports. However, some of the key takeaway points from this survey are: AMCA

membership is composed of primarily mosquito and vector control districts (42%), followed by academia (15%), industry (13%), health departments (11%), federal agencies (5%), and other (14%); over half of our members hold a master's degree or higher, while 30% have obtained PhDs; the most significant impact on our industry are lack of public understanding/support of mosquito control; new and reemerging vector-borne diseases, and mosquito resistance to pesticides; half of the top ten significant impact topics are related to communication and advocacy issues; the most critical priorities in our profession include increased and improved public outreach, and improving individual leadership, management, and administrative skills; our memberships is asking for implementation of innovative tools and techniques; our members are widely distributed across the USA, with the biggest memberships arising out of the South Pacific and South Atlantic; and last, **the survey also expressed that 51% of our respondents work on additional vectors besides mosquitoes!** This survey was a great start to build up towards a community bottom-up approach for a future Strategic Plan. A sample from the summary report is presented in Fig. 1.

Name change consideration. By now, you are well aware that one of the initiatives that I wanted the membership to consider, was incorporating the term "vector" in our official association name. This was by no means an edict or a change that was going to be instigated from a top-down approach. No, my intention was to get the membership to start thinking about this topic and fully discuss and vote on it during a strategic planning or other means. My approach has always been democratic and I believe that all change needs to be made from the bottom, by folks that are conducting the actual work on a day-to-day basis. However, it is important to realize that many of us are indeed the leading local experts when it comes to not just mosquitoes, but many other vectors and insects in general. After all, most of us acquired advanced degrees in entomology! We are often the first ones approached by the public or even other professionals when it comes to insect-related questions. We work with ticks, kissing bugs, black flies, horse flies, deer flies, filth flies, sand flies, biting midges, gnats, fleas, the list goes on and on. We ARE the entomology experts. We ARE the vector control experts. When we advocate for legislation and funding, we advocate on behalf of all vectors, not just mosquitoes. Many of our local programs already *are* Mosquito and Vector Control programs! So why not incorporate the term into our official association name and wear it proudly. The American Mosquito and Vector Control Association does have a nice ring to it, doesn't it (Fig. 2)?! We should not be averse to change, just because this is the way we have always done it. But in the end, I will again reiterate that my intent is not to force a change, but to have the membership come together and make a community decision on this topic. A strategic planning session

IMPACT & GOALS

MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE MOSQUITO CONTROL INDUSTRY:

- Lack of public understanding/support of mosquito control
- New and re-emerging vector-borne diseases
- Mosquito resistance to pesticide

 Half of the top ten significant impact issues are related to communication and advocacy issues.

MOST CRITICAL PRIORITIES IN YOUR WORK:

- Increase and improve public outreach
- Improve my leadership, management, and administrative skills
 - Over three-fourths (76%) of respondents under age 35 want to improve their leadership, management, and administration skills.
- Implement innovative tools and techniques

Fig. 1. A sample from the membership survey that was conducted during 2020–21. The full report may be found at: <https://files.constantcontact.com/1f433099001/120a7b88-09c2-4b47-9937-5743950463eb.pdf>.

would be an ideal opportunity to take up these discussions.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Grant. I am also happy to report that the AMCA was awarded a competitive grant proposal on “Training and Certification for *Culex* (West Nile Virus) Surveillance and Control.” This grant allowed us to develop new best management practices material (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mosquito.org/resource/resmgr/docs/publications/hr_november_2021_amca_bmp_ma.pdf) for mosquito and vector control professionals and will eventually culminate in training opportunities that will further enhance our existing public health infrastructure (Fig. 3). I was extremely thrilled about this opportunity and have no doubts that this will be a positive endeavor for our association, our members, our partners, and public health as a whole. This

opportunity would not have been afforded to us if it was not for the hard work and diligence of key members of our organization. These include Gary Goodman, Rajeev Vaidyanathan, Dave Brown, David Butler and Megan MacNee (AMG), Angela Beehler, Brian Byrd, Mark Clifton, and many others that have selflessly donated their valuable time and expertise. I would also like to thank Roxanne Connelly for all of her inspiration, encouragement, and fervor and to Jennifer Gordon as our independent contractor who expertly brought this endeavor together into a final professional product. I would also like to thank the members of the steering committee and contributors including Jennifer Gordon, Dave Brown, Deborah Bennett, Peter DeChant, Chris Fredregill, Patrick Irwin, Amelia Greiner, Whitney Qualls, Angela Beehler, and Dan Markowski. This grant further enhances our partnership with the CDC and will hopefully pave the way for many other opportunities down the line.

Journal of the American Mosquito Control Association. Yes, we realized that some changes needed to be made and that the journal needed a bit of work to get back to its prestigious position of days before. Our Editor, Lal Mian, has been tirelessly working towards this endeavor and has been doing a fantastic job, but the work demand continues to grow and we had realized that it was time for the journal to acquire Subject Editors to assist him. I am happy to report that the Editorial Board and Publications Committee worked hard to select Subject Editors for the journal and that a formal recommendation was made during the Interim Board Meetings to hire additional Subject Editors. In addition to updating our online presence, for the first time ever in the history of our journal, we hired two new Subject Editors. I welcome Larry Hribar of the Florida Keys Mosquito Control District as our new Systematics Subject Editor and Keira Lucas from Collier Mosquito Control District as our new Pesticide Efficacy/Evaluation Subject Editor. I passionately welcome both of these colleagues and look forward to their upcoming accomplishments. This will certainly be a welcome change for Lal and should be able to help revitalize and further grow our long-standing journal.

Bylaws and Diversity/Inclusivity Subcommittee. We were also able to make some additional needed changes to the bylaws and further grow our diversity and inclusivity during my presidency. I also want to take a moment and thank a few folks that have also



Fig. 2. The membership of the AMCA should consider incorporating the term “vector” into the official name of the association. A Strategic Planning would be an opportune time to discuss such topics.

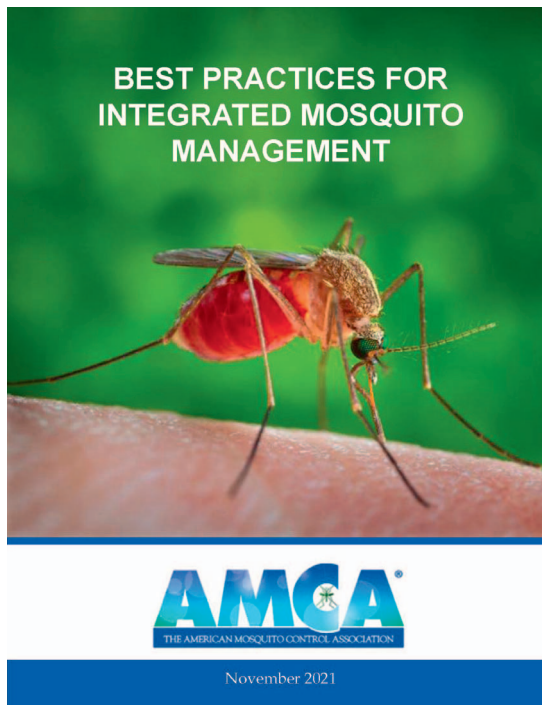


Fig. 3. *Best Practices for Integrated Mosquito Management*, updated in November 2021 through a public health grant to the AMCA provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This open-source document can be downloaded from: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.mosquito.org/resource/resmgr/docs/publications/hr_november_2021_amca_bmp_ma.pdf.

put in numerous hours of volunteer time for your association in order to make things better. These include Herff Jones and Kristen Healy. Herff has been serving as the Board Liaison to the Bylaws Committee, and with the help of Janet McAllister and the rest of the Bylaws Committee, they have been working on addressing a variety of matters that had been brought to our attention. Many of these matters will more than likely culminate in additional Bylaws changes, which the membership will have an opportunity to review and vote on at a later date. Additionally, Kristen Healy was gracious enough to take charge of the newly created Diversity and Inclusivity Subcommittee. I am hopeful that she and the rest of the subcommittee will continue to make strides in ensuring our association is safeguarding the best interests of ALL of our members.

National Public Relations Campaign. The Membership Survey that was conducted clearly defined that one of the most significant impacts on the mosquito control profession is the lack of public understanding and/or support of mosquito control. I believe that it is time for the AMCA and our national partners to start initiating a national outreach and public relations campaign on behalf of mosquito/vector control. I have discussed this topic with our

TA, and he has already gathered his Public Relations Committee to determine what our next step should be. Perhaps it is time for our association to undertake a national campaign to educate the public about our profession and the public health service that we provide. This is going to cost money and time, but it is clearly an underserved aspect of our operations and may reap great benefits for our profession down the line. In fact, I have discussed this with many of you in the past, the idea was really born from Joe Conlon, and building upon the great “Buckle Up for Safety” or “Anti-Smoking” campaigns of the past, perhaps it is time we unroll a “Make Mosquitoes Homeless” or “Fight the Bite” campaign at the national level. Leveraging the national cost of such efforts with our federal partners may be an economical and feasible option for us to realistically undertake this. Unfortunately, my presidency did not have the funding, time, and traction to get this going. I implore future presidents to consider this.

Strengthening relationships and partnerships. The AMCA has always prided itself in collaborating and partnering with a variety of other associations and agencies throughout our history. In recent times, we have been heavily involved in the Entomological Society of America’s (ESA) newly created Vector Borne Disease Network (VBDN). The VBDN is a stakeholder group of nonprofit organizations, including membership and trade associations, vector control groups, federal partners, and educational institutions. The group advocates for vector-borne disease research and management funding, seeks to connect community professionals, and pools valuable resources for the benefit of vector control. We hold a regular seat at their meetings and are proud to be a true partner with the ESA in this endeavor. We are stronger together and hope to take advantage of this partnership, particularly at the federal level. I was also fortunate to participate in ESA’s development of an Associate Certified Entomologist certification program for Public Health Entomology. This certificate was introduced to provide a professional advancement and credential opportunity to those who work with pests of public health importance and once again, allowed for further partnerships between the AMCA and ESA. The above partnership has also continued with other organizations. I am proud for the relationships that we are building and look forward to the benefits that they will offer not just for our members, but the greater community as a whole. Some of these partners include the Society for Vector Ecology, Innovative Vector Control Consortium, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Environmental Health Association, and the National Pest Management Association, just to name a few. Of course, I am not mentioning our already great relationship with the CDC, EPA, FAA, various state and regional associations, and academic institutions. However, one of the latest



Fig. 4. The Pan African Mosquito Control Association Executive Director, Prosper Chaki, and Program Manager, Elijah Juma, speaking with AMCA Members Mike Turell, Mustapha Debboun, and AMCA President Ary Faraji.

partnerships that was officially formalized through an official memorandum of understanding (MOU), was the partnership between the AMCA and the Pan African Mosquito Control Association (PAMCA) (Fig. 4). The primary purpose of this memorandum is to promote knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and cooperation between the two partners for the control of vector-borne diseases. With the rising scientific and operational advances of our African partners, it is time to share the knowledge and skills that we have gained as professional mosquito/vector control entities in the USA and assist our global partners in humanity's fight for betterment of life and enhancement of public health. Let's build on this partnership and continue to grow our profession globally. This MOU paved the way for the attendance of nearly 60 members of PAMCA during our national AMCA conference in 2021. These efforts were largely led by Sam Rund, Prosper Chaki, Elija Juma, and Silas Majambere. Welcome aboard PAMCA, we look forward to working with all of you!

I know I have thrown a lot at you all at once, but you're a mature and seasoned group and I know you can handle it. Our association, just like many others, will not be exempt from the future health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The worse is yet to come. Public health is still currently under attack. Unfortunately, there is a growing distrust of government and public health following this pandemic. Concerns from environmental groups about pesticides, endangered species, risk assessment, non-targets, etc. will continue to mount. And

unfortunately, many of these concerns are based on emotions and politics, and not science. Hence, change is coming and we must be ready for it. But our profession is used to change and I am confident that we will not only meet these challenges but will persevere. Remember that we are who we want to be. We can make our association what we want it to be. All it takes is some effort, some dedication, and some vision. But above all, remember that what you do is important, whether your constituents realize it or not, you are making a positive difference in their everyday lives. What is more satisfying than that? Stand behind the science, the surveillance, and the data. I will highlight the visionary words of Kahlil Gibran, the poet and philosopher of the early 20th century, who stated about work that: "Always you have been told that work is a curse and labor a misfortune. But I say to you that when you work you fulfil a part of earth's furthest dream, assigned to you when the dream was born, and in keeping yourself with labor you are in truth loving life, and to love life through labor is to be intimate with life's inmost secret."

In conclusion, I thank you for allowing me to serve as your president. This presidency, during a global pandemic, was certainly not what I had in mind, but we made the best out of it. I regret that we also had to cancel the in-person AMCA national meetings during 2021 that were scheduled to take place in my home state of Utah, in Salt Lake City. I regret that I was not able to accomplish as much as I wanted, but I will continue to be involved with committees and the association in whatever capacity

I can in the coming years. Remember that you can feed some of the mosquitoes some of the time, but you cannot feed all of the mosquitoes all of the time. Get involved and protect your association. And please care. Care a lot. I appreciate your patience, your support, and your continuing dedication to your craft. I am proud to have served as your president during 2020–21 and I promise that no matter what awaits us, I will give you my best effort

and shall do the best for the association and our profession. Remember, to paraphrase the Grateful Dead, a touch of grey, kind of suits us anyway. We will survive, we will get by. (Grateful Dead, Touch of Grey, 1987)

Keep your dippers wet,
Ary Faraji