

# The COPUS Clarion

A monthly newsletter of the COPUS network Volume 2 Issue 7 July 2008

*The Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) is a grassroots effort linking universities, scientific societies, science centers and museums, advocacy groups, media, educators, government agencies, businesses, and industry in a peer network having as its goal a greater public understanding of the nature of science and its value to society.*

## QUEST: A Different Kind of Science and Nature Adventure

Sue Ellen McCann, QUEST Executive Producer, KQED Public Broadcasting



“Cover everything. Just don’t make it boring.” That was the blunt advice from the 12 science and environment community organizations that gathered at KQED Public Broadcasting back in 2004 for the first conversation about a new Northern California focused science and environment series. The conversation brought together a wide array of community partners including museums, zoos, research institutes, and university partners all to support KQED’s most ambitious local offering ever.

The idea eventually grew into a cross editorial project called QUEST ([www.kqed.org/quest](http://www.kqed.org/quest)) that includes content produced by KQED’s four platforms – web, radio, TV and education. By the third community gathering, the 12 science and environment organizations became the “fifth” platform acting as both story advisors, and event and education partners. In 2007, four more organizations joined the group.

Now at a year and a half into its production cycle, QUEST is reaching a wide audience and produces 48 weekly science and environment radio segments and 20 half-hour TV programs annually. While KQED maintains full editorial control of the QUEST content, the community advisors recommend experts for background research and interviews, and contribute story possibilities. Many of those ideas -- from Bay Area astronomers searching for new planets similar to Earth to an invasion of giant squid off the California coastline -- have made it to radio and TV. Beyond the broadcast, QUEST makes its radio and TV segments available by streaming and download and can easily be ‘embedded’ onto other web sites. Partner museums and research centers enhance their exhibits by including QUEST video segments. QUEST’s community science blog also gave its partners the opportunity to become first-time bloggers, reporting on everything from efforts to remove invasive species to the mysteries of dark energy.

QUEST continues to evolve as new projects are defined and KQED and its partners take advantage of each other’s strengths. Given KQED’s unique role as a public media institution, QUEST can provide training and resources to partners in using multi-media to educate and explain science to the public. In return, QUEST relies upon the science expertise of its partners combined with media tools such as mobile devices, photographs, video, audio and GPS, to create science/nature hikes, maps and other community-based science media content.

With these partnerships already in place, it was only natural that KQED and the QUEST project would see COPUS and its Year of Science 2009 initiative as a wonderful opportunity to broaden and strengthen connections with the community. As an active participant in the COPUS San Francisco Regional Hub, QUEST is finding new ways to collaborate and reach new audiences. KQED plans to program TV, radio and interactive content tied to the monthly Year of Science themes and look for opportunities to co-sponsor events such as Science Cafés and science hikes. Partners have also requested that KQED offer new media training to the community on how to create digital content such as widgets and podcasts that can be shared with new audiences and each other.

The unique partnership of institutions that comprise QUEST has come a long way since its 2004 inception, and as it expands its efforts through COPUS, and continually charts new territory in science and media -- the “boring” factor is nowhere in sight.

For a complete list of the QUEST partners, go to [www.kqed.org/quest/about](http://www.kqed.org/quest/about).

### Welcome New Participants!

- American Society for Photobiology
- American Society of Mammalogists
  - Beth Schachter Consulting
  - Hudson Valley Science Cafe
- Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation
  - COSEE SouthEast
- Delaware Valley Science Fairs, Inc.
  - Down to a Science
- Entomological Foundation, Inc.
  - GalaxyGoo
- Museum of Life and Science
  - Ocean Institute
  - Science Café, Little Rock
  - Science Writers in New York
- Stanford University Office of Science Outreach
- Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, University of the Pacific
  - Washington Middle School
  - WGBH Radio Boston
  - WGBH

### Welcome New International Participants!

- Darwin 200
- School of Marine Science and Technology, Newcastle University

# Featured Program: *What A Year!*

## Cool Science is Happening Now

Dr. Alan B. Dittrich, President

Massachusetts Society for Medical Research, Inc.



As a society whose members are themselves biomedical research organizations and supporters of research, we are committed to helping improve Life Sciences education. Concerned that current high school students might not have a realistic view of research, we sought an accessible learning tool which would specifically emphasize that research is:

- ◆ Collaborative;
- ◆ Incremental;
- ◆ Continually ongoing in many settings; and
- ◆ Accomplished by all sorts of people who share the common traits of great curiosity and the desire to improve human and animal health.

*What A Year! highlights a breakthrough each month and gives some information about the people behind it. You can learn what's going on in your scientific backyard, and to dig a lot deeper if you want.*

*All around us, every day, science is happening!*

We developed a website, updated each month with the story of a current research breakthrough, rewritten for high school students and teachers, and presented with as much web-savvy as we can muster. We named the project **What A Year!** because each research year is composed of exciting months.

Each month our writer scans journals and news releases and then proposes several possible stories. We pick one and contact the investigator involved to measure his or her willingness to participate. The participating investigator agrees to be interviewed, to provide a lab team photo, and to offer images such as whiteboards, time-lapse photos, and anything else that will help make the story more lively on the web. We also seek links to radio and television interviews, animations, or complementary sites.

Our writer produces the draft, which is then read by several people, including a high school student, to make sure it "works" for the intended audience. We accompany it with a Student Worksheet and a Teacher Guidance and post it on the website ([www.WhatAYear.org](http://www.WhatAYear.org)) along with any interesting connections we can find, from YouTube videos to cartoons to websites of pertinent health organizations.

Once the story is posted, we e-blast a tease announcement to our database.

To students who might believe that all science was completed just in time to make it into their textbooks, or that every great advance sprang complete into the mind of a single scientist, it is important to show that science works differently. Because we also cover a spectrum of science and research, we can run a story on Batten Disease one month and suspended animation as a protector of heart attack and stroke victims the next. So each month, in a few minutes, a student can find something fun to learn about.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to increase science enthusiasm and literacy. Every student who enjoys interacting with the website and gets excited about research - thanks to **What A Year!** - will become a better informed citizen, with all the future benefits that produces. More immediately, we get a strong link to students and teachers, encourage participants in our essay/poster competitions, and gain additional credibility in the educational community. We also build bonds with the researchers who agree to participate, and have recently found organizations coming to us with story ideas for **What A Year!** based on research in their institutions.



**Questions? Comments? Ideas?** Contact Sheri Potter at [spotter@copusproject.org](mailto:spotter@copusproject.org).

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