

The CACNews

News of the California Association of Criminalists • Spring 2024



The President's Desk

Sheltri Gresham



CAC President

“Was this, or is this PTSD?”

Can someone who is a later responder and not truly on the scene first be as affected as those responsible for scene and public safety?”

Self Care

The theme of my last President’s message actually came about a few months ago when I sat down to dinner with CAC’s Editorial Secretary, Jonathan Charron. We had run into each other during a lunch break earlier in the week and decided to meet up for dinner to chat about CAC business. When I finally made it to dinner, I had just come from a long day of learning about trajectory calculations at the California Criminalistics Institute (CCI), and my brain was, for lack of a better word, fried.

So, there we were, having just sat down, ordered drinks and dinner and he asked me one simple question: “How are you doing today?” Normally, anyone asking me this question would receive my typical response of “I’m good. How about you?” But today felt different. I had been away from home for a few days and was missing my family. I was stressed about so many things both work and non-work related that when Jonathan asked me that simple question, my response was “I think I’m ok, but I’m not entirely sure”.

After sharing work stories about interesting cases and our collective time on the bench, our conversation took on a more personal tone, sharing stories of our loved ones and life experiences. The more we talked, the more I realized that Jonathan’s demeanor left me completely at ease, and it wasn’t long before I opened the floodgates and unloaded all of my stresses. With a very patient ear, Jonathan listened to my avalanche of woes.

I have felt, and often still feel extreme guilt about being away from my kids for days at a time, especially while they are still young and like spending time with me. My home life is a constant vortex of the kids’ school activities, home improvement projects, running errands and trying to actually spend time with my kids, husband and extended family. How can I make time for myself, when according to my doctor, any potential free time I have should be spent exercising and avoiding carbs to keep any health issues at bay?

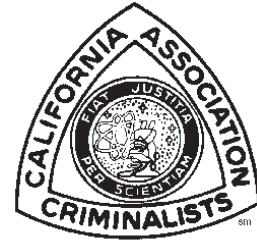
When it comes to work, I have had various roles I’ve filled. There was a point in time I was filling in as an acting supervisor. I had hoped I would love the job and could promote eventually, making the final decade of my career one of supporting the younger crew on the bench. Alas, I found myself missing casework and crime scene response, and I felt angry at myself for feeling this way. Why did the idea of a natural progression into management after 20+ years of experience seem more like a death sentence? Additionally, while in that position, I was not actively doing casework which left more work for my coworkers to do, all while we were implementing a new paperless system that we were all struggling with. I felt as though my self-ascribed “tech-savvy” abilities were becoming as outdated as a rotary telephone. Finally, although I have felt pure excitement when responding to crime scenes, one scene in particular was heinous, and to this day fills me with great sadness, fear and the occasional nightmare. Was this, or is this PTSD? Can someone who is a later responder and not truly on the scene first be as affected as those responsible for scene and public safety? Was I or am I being overdramatic about it?

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SPRING 2024

The CACNews

www.cacnews.org



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The President's Desk

*"I'm not a superhero,
I'm just a working mom
trying to leave a positive
impact on society."*

After bending Jonathan's ear to the point of breaking, we both took a deep breath and settled into a wonderful discussion about our mental health, and how we manage the balance between all of these things that cause stress in our lives. We both realized that the topics of mental health, emotional well-being and self-care have become more prevalent in society, and even in CAC, through several workshops and discussions that have been held during our seminars. The more Jonathan and I talked, and the more I've learned from some of our younger members, I have realized that it is okay to make time for myself. It is ok to take time out for doing something fun, and not the things I have convinced myself I must do. It is okay to have chocolate sometimes, just maybe limit it to a piece or two and not the entire 1-pound variety box. It's okay to forgo a 30 minute workout on the days when I just...can't. It's okay to sign up for therapy, whether it's a routine visit or just a phone call when you need it. I'm not a superhero, I'm just a working mom trying to leave a positive impact on society.

Ultimately, my discussion with Jonathan led me to the realization of TWO important points. First, I'm not the only one with fears, insecurities, anxiety and stress. Even though sometimes I feel like a bundle of over-firing neurons stranded on a desert island, our conversation made it clear that Jonathan deals with similar feelings from time to time and that we were both able to share those feelings when in a safe environment. Second, there are resources out there! While it was amazing to unload all of my woes onto Jonathan, not all of our friends and family have the capacity to listen and comfort us when they may too be dealing with their own burdens. I have since learned to find solace in quiet walks and scheduled quiet time for myself when I don't have someone available to talk to. I can make time for myself to decompress, even if only for a few minutes, and it makes a world of difference.

Lastly, as I am about to end my term as CAC President, I have an admission to make. I wasn't entirely sure what I was getting myself into when I accepted the nomination as President-Elect. I assumed that someone would run against me. No one did, and next thing I knew, I got the job. The moment the vote passed at our Long Beach Seminar, I sat there rather dumbfounded, wondering why I thought taking on another job at that particular point in my life was a good idea.

Once I took over as President in 2023, I reflected on the numerous great presidents before me, their many accomplishments and accolades. Did I, an outspoken, brash redhead with an attitude and occasional sailor's mouth deserve to place my name on the same list as those who came before me? Maybe. Maybe not. Due to this momentary feeling of doubt, I had waited to sign my name on the Presidential coconut. I wanted to make sure I had properly earned the right to do so. However, at the end of the day (and my term), I feel like I have proudly done my part serving the association to the best of my ability. I'll finally be signing that coconut knowing that despite any misgivings I have about myself, the CAC membership has supported me since day one. Thank you all for your advice and support. Please feel free to reach out to me in the future should any of you ever find yourselves needing someone to talk to or confide in.

Regards,

Sheltri Gresham





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Jonathan Charron



CAC Editorial Secretary

“If you told me back then that my time spent serving food at Cattlemens Steakhouse would change my path and help shape my career as a forensic scientist, I would have laughed at the very thought.”

Food, Forensics, and the Future

I have always tried to be mindful of the people and experiences that have helped me pave my path. This is particularly true since my path has had many forks along the way where I have needed some guidance or advice. When I originally attended college down as a music major, I made ends meet by working in a restaurant. If you told me back then that my time spent serving food at Cattlemens Steakhouse would change my path and help shape my career as a forensic scientist, I would have laughed at the very thought. How could something so unrelated to forensics develop me into a better scientist? Now, after having been a criminalist now for almost 10 years, I would no longer laugh and wholeheartedly agree that the restaurant industry is an amazing venue to develop skills needed as a forensic scientist. For those who have never been in the service industry, my previous statement may not make complete sense. However, before exploring the topic of mentorship in this editorial, I'm going to have some fun and try to convince you that even a restaurant setting can be a good training ground for future forensic practitioners.

While a questioned documents or handwriting analyst is not a commonplace position in many of our laboratories, most restaurants usually have one or two staff members who are “experts” in this type of analysis. It is a rare night when working in a dining establishment that you don't overhear a conversation at a computer terminal along the lines of, “Do you think that is a ‘4’ or a ‘9’?” Hopefully the ambiguously written tip can be deduced by the total they sign for, but understandably even simple math can be complicated after a big steak dinner and the resident handwriting expert needs to be called in to analyze the pen strokes. Careful analysis of the other numbers, how they write curved versus straight lines, and hopefully a direct comparison to the same number they wrote somewhere else all come in to play to ensure the server gets the tip intended and the guest is not incorrectly over charged.

Document examination even comes in to play with printed documents in restaurants. A familiar restaurant sound (and often triggering for those in that industry) is the rhythmic yet atonal sound of a ticket printer. This sound alerts all bartenders or cooks that yet another order has been sent to add to the stack of tickets they are already preparing. All in all, it is a pretty good system, but when something is off with the printer or a ticket gets wet, some forensic techniques are quickly needed to get the order out. In the case of a wet ticket printed on thermal paper, I have found it best to use oblique lighting. Some ticket printer paper can be really reflective when wet, making 90-degree lighting ineffective at revealing the order. And when dealing with a printer that is having trouble with the ink ribbon, indented writing analysis is there to save the day! A little rub of a pencil lightly over that seemingly blank ticket can help you see that table 2 wants their Porterhouse cooked medium rare with a loaded baked potato.

Even some of the trace disciplines are commonly utilized within the 4 walls of a restaurant. On the very rare occasion a hair makes its way onto a plate or into a food item, a full-blown investigation will immediately commence. The color, length, and overall characteristic of the rogue hair is inspected and documented. A full scene reconstruction may then occur recounting who had contact with that plate as it made its way from the kitchen to the table. While

The Editor's Desk

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class eliminations are common and effective in this restaurant forensic discipline, it is often never identified with any level of certainty back to the guilty party.

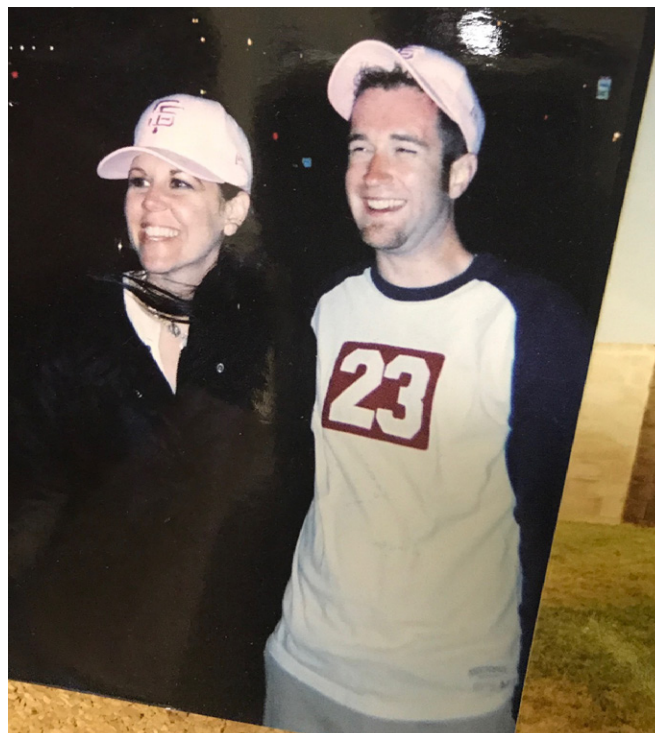
While only scratching the surface of why a restaurant is a great training ground for forensic scientists (I could write an entire book on the investigative techniques in determining who didn’t complete their sidework correctly), I hope this little restaurant related side path on my editorial has been enjoyable, especially for those who have spent time in the food service industry at some point in their life.

With that, I am now pulling up to the part of this road where I get to my point. The importance of mentorship. While we have all had to walk many different paths to get where we are, we were likely given some guidance along the way. In my restaurant days, my Director of Training challenged and shaped me to become a better trainer, communicator, and overall better problem solver (Thank you Kelly!). Without her support and guidance, I may not have developed the skills needed to make me into the confident scientist I am today. Having that support changed the way I approach and view the world, my work, and the people I work with.

I want to challenge you all to be a mentor for someone. In my mind, it is our responsibility to inspire, develop, and train the next generation. Write protocol for your lab to accept internships if it doesn’t have one already, speak at a local high school or college forensic science club, or even volunteer to help give tours of your labs to local groups. By actively engaging and mentoring the next generation of forensic scientists, we can help them understand the roles we play as criminalists, why we do things the way that we do, and

hopefully even learn from them how their generation views our role in the world. This connection opens the lines of communication between perspectives in hopes of building a stronger future. We can be the person they practice interview skills with, call for advice before their first testimony, or grab a drink with to share “war stories” of really challenging casework at an upcoming CAC conference once they have established themselves.

Mentorship takes time, understanding, sacrifice, and patience, but the benefit to both parties makes that a price worth paying. Casework, proficiency test deadlines, and meetings aren’t going away, so we must make the commitment to ourselves to make the time to shape the future. That commitment is worth it. With a field full of well-connected, confident, and peer-supported criminalists, we will continue producing amazing work and giving voices to victims across the criminal justice system.



Above: Jonathan Charron with one of his first mentors, Kelly.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

RE: *New Directions in the New Year?*

The American Board of Criminalistics (ABC) Board of Directors reviewed the referenced [editorial article](#) in The CACNews Winter Issue and wanted to offer our perspective.

The ABC has strived to encourage certification for a number of reasons. Regardless of a nationwide mandate or lack-there-of, there are several reasons we feel certification benefits us as forensic scientists. Scientists may want to become certified because of the intrinsic value in achieving a goal that requires specialized knowledge and skills (regardless of mandate or incentive). This can not only provide increased personal value of oneself as a forensic scientist, but also an additional qualification that can be used in testimony, teaching, and other aspects of the field. Attaining certification also promotes professional involvement through recertification requirements that encourage certificants to attend conferences and meetings, teach law enforcement and nurses, train new employees, and give presentations to educate others about our field. Certification is also specific to the individual forensic scientist while accreditation is specific to a laboratory. For example, if a forensic scientist changes jobs, they will continue to maintain their certification as long as they meet the recertification requirements.

The process for attaining certification includes an application step to address the required qualifications and references for the certification examination requested. The application is reviewed by a credentialing committee. Once credentialed, the applicant can pursue preparations for the exam sitting by studying the recommended references. This process will typically require the applicant to focus and study the details of the discipline they work in every day. While the Foundational Knowledge Examination (FKE) is one exam we offer, we also offer other exams in various disciplines and continue to research how we can best serve the forensic science community with certification while also maintaining the requirements we adhere to for



exam development under accreditation from the ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB).

Exam development through the ABC is an extensive process that involves the work of many people, hours, and steps to achieve a quality examination that can be used for certification. This process is several years long and examines the knowledge, skills, and tasks required for a particular job within a forensic laboratory. The development of a certification scheme, examination questions, study guide, field test, and final test involves several processes and also continuous maintenance for quality assurance. All of these steps are performed by volunteer forensic scientists who are actively involved with our Examination Committee as well as subject matter experts assisting the ABC.

We offer this perspective to educate forensic scientists on the ABC certification process and the benefits of certification. We believe that ensuring a forensic scientist is adequately performing their job is the result of many factors that may include training, proficiency testing, testimony observation, technical review, and administrative review, along with other factors such as accreditation and certification. We also want to point out that licensure and certification are distinctly different. Licensure is a process typically regulated and mandated by a jurisdictional agency/government while certification is typically voluntary and provided by entities outside of a jurisdictional agency/government. While some agencies may mandate certification, most allow an adequate amount of time and grace period for a scientist to obtain it. Whether or not certification is ever mandated nationally or internationally, we believe the benefits should encourage agencies and forensic scientists to explore their certification options.

Respectfully submitted,

**The American Board of Criminalistics
Board of Directors**



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Offsite Event – CAC Seminar

Please join QIAGEN for its 4th Annual Customer Appreciation Event

Location: Library Bar
630 W 6th Street
Suite 116A
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Date and Time: Tuesday, April 16, 2024 from 6-9pm

Limited space is available. If interested, please contact Josh Abernathy
(josh.abernathy@qiagen.com)





2024 CAC Board Nominations

Nikolas Lemos for President-Elect

Nikolas Lemos, a native of Greece, is board-certified as Fellow of the American Board of Forensic Toxicology (F-ABFT) and started his career researching alcohol and drug detection analysis in alternative biological specimens including nails and bile. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Criminalistics/Forensic Chemistry in 1992, his Master's in Forensic Science (Toxicology) in 1996 and his Doctorate in Forensic Medicine and Science (Analytical and Forensic Toxicology) in 1999.

He worked in academia in London, England before accepting the position of Chief Forensic Toxicologist at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the City and County of San Francisco in 2003. In 2005 he was appointed Director of the Forensic Laboratory Division of the same Office where he spearheaded both the ABFT accreditation of that lab and the successful certification by ABFT of its staff forensic toxicologists. He joined CAC in the early 2000s and for almost a decade chaired the Northern Region CAC Study Groups for Alcohol and for Toxicology.

Nikolas consults in administrative, civil and criminal cases in California and all over the world. In California he closely works with the San Francisco Police Department, the California Highway Patrol, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the US Park Police, the San Francisco District Attorney and the San Francisco Public Defender and has testified in over 330 trials. Additionally, he successfully lobbied and helped raise over \$60 million through various voters' bond initiatives towards a new state-of-the-art medical examiner's facility which was put in operation in November 2017.

He hosted several scientific meetings and served as Chair of the Ethics Committee of the California Association of Toxicologists from its inception until 2022. He is active in TIAFT (elected board member in February 2022), SOFT, IACFT (founding member) and the National Association of Medical Examiners. He is Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry (UK), Honorary Fellow of the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine (UK) and Fellow of American Academy of Forensic Sciences (Toxicology Section) where he served as its first Chair of the Diversity and Outreach Committee and its elected Toxicology Section Chair from 2018 to 2019.

He holds academic appointments in London (Professor of Forensic Medical Sciences), Athens (Visiting Professor at the Laboratory of Forensic Pathology and Toxicology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens); and Saint Louis (Professor in the Department of Pathology and Toxicology at Saint Louis University). He has authored/co-authored over 85 peer-reviewed papers, abstracts, and book chapters including the first ever study of Cannabinoids in Fingernails (JAT, May 1999) and the first ever study of Cannabinoids in Post-mortem Toxicology (JAT, September 2011). He previously served as Science Editor of "Medicine, Science and the Law," the Official Journal of the British Academy of Forensic Sciences and is currently the Forensic Toxicology Editor-in-Chief for "Forensic Sciences Research."

He is recipient of numerous scholarships, research and equipment grants and awards. In 2005, he was honoured by the 109th Congress of the United States of America with a Proclamation of Achievement "for dedicating his life and career to community safety and social awareness."



2024 CAC Board Nominations



Adam Dutra for President-Elect

Adam Dutra is currently the DNA Technical Manager at the San Diego Police Department Crime Lab, where he has worked for over 22 years. Prior to that, he worked at the California Department of Justice for three years, first as a Laboratory Technician and then a Criminalist. He has been a CAC member since 1999 and has attended all but one CAC seminar since that time. He is a past president of the CAC and served as the CAC Membership Secretary from 2004 until 2006. He is a member and former chair of the CAC Bylaws Committee, and has served on the Ethics Committee, Training and Resources Committee, and the Nomination Committee. He served as the workshop coordinator when SDPD hosted the CAC 2007 Spring Seminar and organized the general session when SDPD hosted the CAC 2018 Fall Seminar. He has given multiple presentations at CAC seminars and is a recipient of the Alfred A. Biasotti Most Outstanding Presentation Award. He has received the Anthony Longhetti Distinguished Member Award, the W. Jack Cadman Award, and the Paul Kirk and Presidents Award for contributions to the CAC and the profession of criminalistics. He is certified by the American Board of Criminalistics in General Criminalistics and Molecular Biology. He would be honored to serve you as CAC President-Elect.



Darlene Espejo for Recording Secretary

It is an honor to be nominated for the CAC board position of Recording Secretary. I am a Senior Criminalist for the California Department of Justice at the Jan Bashinski DNA laboratory in Richmond. I began my career in forensics in 2012 in the Databank unit, where I not only worked with the robotics team but also worked on validations and familial searches. In 2018, I transitioned into my current position in the Casework unit and at the same time I joined CAC as an associate member. In 2022, I became a full member.

I have been attending CAC seminars and study groups since 2016. I have enjoyed the continuing education CAC provides, as well as the connections to the amazing people from all agencies that I would otherwise not have been able to make on my own. I also assisted with planning and coordinating the 2021 Fall Seminar. Currently, I have been serving as Interim Recording Secretary since mid-2023, since Gunther Scharnhorst has become President-Elect.

With this nomination, I hope to continue working as your Recording Secretary. In doing so, I hope to not only broaden my knowledge of CAC, but also its members and the field of forensics. I will do my best to serve the CAC as a member of the Board of Directors. Thank you for your consideration for this position.



Stephanie James for Regional Director North

Stephanie started her career in 2002 and spent 20 years as DNA analyst for both the state of California and then the county of Sacramento. For the last year and a half, she has been a Supervising Criminalist and Quality Manager for the Sacramento County DA Laboratory of Forensic Services. In addition to currently serving on the board as the Regional Director North for the California Association of Criminalists, she is a member of ASCLD and AFQAM, and a Technical Assessor for ANAB.



2024 CAC Board Nominations

Megan Caulder for Membership Secretary



It is an honor to be nominated for the CAC board position of Membership Secretary. I am currently employed by the California Department of Justice Jan Bashinski DNA Laboratory. I started at CAL-DOJ as a Criminalist in 2009 working in the Databank section. In 2014 I promoted to Senior Criminalist and also started working in the Biology/DNA Casework section. I am one of the alternate CODIS administrators for my laboratory and hold certification in Molecular Biology by the American Board of Criminalistics.

I first joined the CAC in 2005 as a Student Affiliate member while working on my master's degree in forensic science at UC Davis and later gave a presentation on my thesis research at a DNA workshop. I eventually became a Full member in 2011 and served as the Northern DNA Study Group Chairperson from 2013 to 2016. I have attended many CAC workshops, seminars, and study group meetings over the years. I also had the opportunity to serve on the planning committee for the October 2021 CAC Seminar, which was one of the most fun and rewarding experiences that I have had as a CAC member! I truly value my involvement in the CAC as it offers a way to communicate and collaborate amongst colleagues about current forensic technologies, issues, and cases.

I have had the pleasure of serving the CAC as Membership Secretary since 2016 and would be thrilled to contribute to the Board of Directors in this role for another term. Thank you for your consideration for the position of Membership Secretary.



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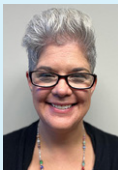
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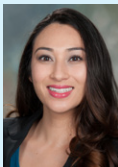
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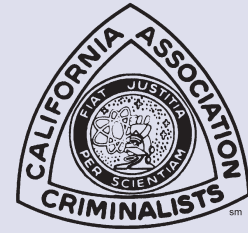


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