



# YOU BE THE CHEMIST

THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES FACE TOUGH COMPETITION FOR BRIGHT, YOUNG MINDS. YBTC PROGRAMS PROVIDE NORTH AMERICAN STUDENTS A FIGHTING CHANCE.

Isabel Alexander

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” The likelihood of a young student spontaneously answering, “I want a career in the chemical industry” is low. I suspect it would be an unpopular answer for adults also. Some new acquaintances recoil when they ask me what I do for a living and I respond that I own a chemical company.

Statistics show that a high percentage of western society thinks of chemicals as harmful to life and the environment. The word chemical has a nasty, “toxic waste” stigma attached to it for most children and adults.

The truth is, life would be dismal without chemistry. In my opinion, our industry has done a poor job correcting the negative perceptions manufactured from events of the past and media sensationalism. We have done too little to build awareness of the huge

investment and advancements made in environmental preservation and renewal, in product stewardship, and in industry driven codes of practice such as Responsible Distribution® and Responsible Care®. Credit should be given to the strides made in the research, development, and innovation that results in a better quality of life, every day for everyone on this planet.

The chemical industry cannot leave its destiny in the hands of government or educational institutions. We must take the lead and educate for our industry’s future. We must market the sciences and chemical industry as entities vital to the constant improvement of the quality of life for humans, other life forms, and Mother Earth.

Our industry should be in demand as a source of rewarding, fulfilling, and stimulating careers. However, we face tough competition for the bright young minds and skilled workers of today’s and the next generations.

Without their contribution, we face even greater challenges for a sustainable chemical industry on this continent, and this has far-reaching implications on all commercialization and innovation rooted in North America.

One way to lead the change and to influence positive interest in our industry is to support the work of the Chemical Educational Foundation (CEF). CEF is an internationally recognized, award-winning organization based in Washington, DC. Its central mission is to promote the value, importance, and benefits of chemistry education and chemicals. CEF believes that investing in science education for the young is vital to the future of the chemical industry, its affiliated organizations, and our communities as a whole.

CEF has created several educational programs aimed at engaging educators and students of grades kindergarten through eight in science education. CEF's "You Be The Chemist" (YBTC) programs include:

- YBTC activity guides;
- Lesson plans for making chemistry fun;
- YBTC Challenge—an exciting academic chemistry competition that engages students in grades five through eight in learning important concepts and discoveries;
- YBTC Lesson Plan Competition—a competition that awards cash prizes to educators for their innovative teaching techniques.

CEF believes that increased exposure to science education in the formative years will improve the general understanding of, participation in, and acceptance of chemistry, chemicals, and the chemical industry itself. Simply put, it is more effective to create understanding and appreciation of science in the young than to attempt to develop such knowledge later in life.

CEF executive director John Rice said, "Using CEF programs serves as an effective method of bridging the chemical industry and community gap, and helps provide a countermeasure against negative perceptions created by misunderstanding and fear. Use of CEF materials also provides an avenue for constructive dialogue between industry and the community."

CEF provides programs for companies to introduce themselves to communities where they do business. In turn, these programs create tremendous community outreach opportunities for industry members, positioning them as engaged members of the community.

Most importantly, CEF programs help assure that students are being given an extra boost when it comes to science education.

In November 2007, the Canadian Association of Chemical Distributors (CACD) increased its endorsement of CEF's mandate. They formed the first CACD You Be The Chemist committee. The Canadian YBTC committee is chaired by me, Isabel Alexander, president of Phancorp Inc., and co-chaired by Michael Staley, president of Brenntag Canada Inc. CACD's board of directors pledged their support to the new committee and increased



Laura Dornbusch, president of Expo Chemical Company, Inc. and the current CEF vice-president stands with the student winners of the 2007 Houston Regional YBTC Competition.

the association's commitment to education. Cathy Campbell, CACD's executive director, challenged the YBTC committee to build upon the leadership of our sister organization in the U.S.—the National Association of Chemical Distributors (NACD)—and make YBTC a successful program across Canada.

I am a mother, a grandmother, a conservationist, an environmentalist, and an employer. I know first hand that the chemical industry is a much misunderstood and under-appreciated facet of our lives and our future. As an industry, we are responsible for our own challenges and image. The YBTC kits, programs, and awards are an easy way to make changes today in the public's perception of chemicals and chemistry.

The new YBTC committee has already had enthusiastic response from the distribution and chemical manufacturers of Canada. Our plan is to raise awareness and funds to ensure that YBTC kits and programs are available to academic institutions and groups in Canada that will support and contribute to the understanding and value of chemistry globally. It is good corporate social responsibility. It is excellent business strategy!

Volunteers are enthusiastically encouraged to join the Canadian committee to ensure representation across Canada with talents and resources to cover our geographic, language, and cultural diversity. With support, we hope to launch the first French language version of YBTC soon and to rival our U.S. sister's YBTC success on a national level. Next goal—an international YBTC challenge! I welcome your expression of interest to volunteer or donate at the contact numbers below.

Mike Staley, co-chair of the new committee challenged, "Brenntag has already shown its support of the CEF programs from the top down, as demonstrated by the commitment of Stephen Clark, president and CEO of Brenntag Global. Clark is currently serving as president of the CEF and has served on the board of trustees for several years. We challenge our peers, our suppliers, and our customers to step up to the plate! Contribute dollars or sweat equity. Sponsor a community or fundraising event. Start a YBTC outreach program. Volunteer to deliver YBTC kits or give hands-on time in classrooms. Get involved and just do it!"

For more information about contributing to the CACD's YBTC initiative, contact me at [ialexander@phancorp.com](mailto:ialexander@phancorp.com) or at 905-790-8875. Or contact Cathy Campbell at [ccampbell@cacd.ca](mailto:ccampbell@cacd.ca) or at 905-844-9140.

For more information about the Chemical Educational Foundation or You Be The Chemist, visit [www.chemed.org](http://www.chemed.org) or contact CEF staff at [comments@chemed.org](mailto:comments@chemed.org) or 703-527-6223.

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*Isabel Alexander is president of Phancorp, Inc. and chair of the Canadian Association of Importers and Exporters.*