Name & Credentials: Carol Pancoska Ph.D. D(ABHI)

Title: HLA Laboratory Director

Employment: Semi-retired laboratory consultant

Graduated from: B.A. in Microbiology from UCLA; Ph.D. in Immunology Rutgers University Graduate School

How long have you been an ASHI member? 25 years

Where was the ASHI meeting held the first time you attended? I cannot remember my first ASHI meeting but I have only missed 2 in the last 25 years. They were all special because of friendships formed and collaborations established.

What made you decide to work in HLA? As an undergrad at UCLA in the ’60s, immunology students were introduced to HLA because Dr. Terasaki had started his HLA lab and his pioneering work in histocompatibility testing. A few years later, at the Irwin Memorial Blood Bank in San Francisco, Dr. Herb Perkins had established his HLA lab and again I learned of the transplant implications of HLA. Over the next 18 years, although I was still in blood banking, I became increasingly aware of the similarities between testing for transfusion compatibility and testing for transplant compatibility as well as the remarkable similarities in the consequences of transfusion and transplant incompatibility. As I was completing my Ph.D., an opportunity presented itself to become a director trainee in an OPO histocompatibility lab that also provided full service histocompatibility testing for several transplant programs. It was HLA boot camp and I loved it. I continue to be involved in blood banking and whenever possible, I try to talk blood banking to HLA people and teach an understanding of HLA concepts to blood bankers.

Most rewarding aspect: One very rewarding aspect of my work has always been resolving difficult antibody testing and crossmatching problems and finding a way to identify a compatible donor organ for the highly sensitized recipient. Just as rewarding is the opportunity to teach new transplant professionals about HLA through its history and development of the science and technology. My hope is that my colleagues in transplant will appreciate HLA as much as I do. Of course, the opportunity to work on various ASHI committees is also rewarding and I encourage everyone who works in HLA to volunteer. The experiences and friendships I’ve gained far outweigh the time and energy commitments. My favorite was the ARB from inspector to commissioner, from co-chair to director.

Fun fact: I love to sing. It started more than 20 years ago when I joined my church choir - rehearsals every Thursday, singing every Sunday. Since then, I took some more formal training in singing and music. Whenever possible, I join other choral groups for special events. I am an itinerant alto. Most recently, I joined the Cathedral Basilica Festival Choir and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra for a performance of Mozart’s Grand Mass in C minor. I am still singing every Sunday at home.

It is no secret that I am a rabid baseball fan. I played softball years ago as a center fielder and long ball specialist. Now I am a New York Yankees fan (or any team that can beat the Boston Red Sox) and I get out to the Yankee Stadium every chance I get.